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LEAH



BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"DOUGHT WE TO VISIT HER."



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LEAH:  
A WOMAN OF FASHION.

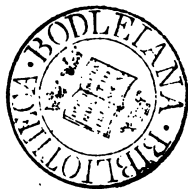
BY

MRS. EDWARDES,

AUTHOR OF "OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?"  
"SUSAN FIELDING," "STEVEN LAWRENCE," &c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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## LEAH : A WOMAN OF FASHION.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### TRANSFORMATION.

THE assertion savours of paradox, yet I believe it to be true, that had Leah never come across Danton, or known pure love's taste, her chances of salvation as Jack Chamberlayne's wife had been greater.

I said at the commencement of this story that hers were the very virtues to derive nourishment from prosperity ; lapped in soft silks, fed on costly food from costly dishes, and

crowned with irreproachable sets of emeralds and diamonds for the world's approval. Married for money, with neither remembrance nor expectancy of aught beyond, Leah—doubt it not—had been circumspect enough. She is Colonel Pascal's child, and, but for that one accidental meeting, might have walked from her cradle to her grave with every tender, perilous faculty inherited from her mother undeveloped. Do you suppose there are not, in most of us, some finer potentialities than those which the dull treadmill of our lot has served to awaken?

. . . But to a soul that has once gone out of itself in love, danger, pleasure, pain, all human chances of evil and of good are multiplied for ever. Why, this Leah whom we see now is literally not the same woman whom we first saw essaying sprays and coronets before her glass in Paris. To Leah Pascal nature was a background, more or less becoming, for picnics and garden-

parties, with Leah Pascal always as the prominent foreground adornment; art, in the form of royal academies, or operas, a convenient means of seeing the latest fashions, and displaying to the world one's own latest conquest. Leah Chamberlayne, feverishly alive to every external influence, will gaze at a midnight sky or amber sunset—even amidst the turmoil of a London season—with emotion as much beyond her tears as it is beyond her power of analysis. The scent of certain flowers thrills her to pain. Despite her want of ear, music begins to have a charmed voice for her. And all this, while the sisterhood of folly are copying her bonnets, the brotherhood of inanity contending for—alas, and winning—her smiles? An aspirant leader of fashion, and the soul within her struggling hourly into passionate life. Monstrous anomaly! I would say, had not experience taught me to look for *every* anomaly, *every* contradiction in the

heart that has newly passed from self's narrow darkness into love.

Imagine a man born blind who should come unexpectedly into great wealth, and just about the same time receive, as by miracle, the gift of sight. The crowd thinks of nothing save his equipages, his town and country house, his entertainments. But the man himself—could millions of gold, do you believe, affect him strongly with the fresh raptures of grass and river and sky, bewildering his sense at every turn? Money that can ransom us from no deep grief can assuredly purchase for us no exalted joy. Leah has inherited her very wishes, "the buildings of her fancy," with the certainty, daily strengthening, of their life tenure, and derives from them not one tithe of the pleasure or the pain that "Si tu savais" played by a street organ, or the sudden sweetness of a bunch of violets, have power to bring her.

Possibly things might have gone better if she had had one wholesome source of interest derived from money, could have seen Deb growing strong through its agency, Deb overjoyed with London toys and riding-habits made by the tailor. But fortune, who so seldom comes to us with both hands full, has in this matter been froward. Scarcely was Leah's splendid marriage six months old, when Colonel Pascal, to his mingled amazement and joy, found the burthen of existence lightened of another daughter. "You recollect your dear Aunt Hepzibah?" Thus he announced the stroke of good fortune to Leah. "The only one of the family who, during the trials of my early married days, remained a friend to your sainted mother. Your Aunt Hepzibah, lately left a widow and independent, has offered to adopt my beloved little Deb as her own child. The feelings with which I contemplate such a separation I leave to my Leah to guess.

But what parent would allow selfish considerations to interfere with a child's welfare? Deb is to be clothed, educated, provided for by my admirable sister-in-law, and starts for her new home on Monday." And this was Deb's postscript: "Aunt hepzibah lives at Ramsgitt, and there are Shells and Donkeys and a tortis-Hell cat with Kittens, and I can't sleep at night for joy. And Papa and Naomi *will live alone!!*"

So, as far as rescuing Deb from pauperism went, the sacrifice or her marriage need never have been made. The letter reached Leah at Monaco, just before she began the experiment of gambling, and gave, perhaps, the finishing touch needed to her profound sense of self-abasement. She went, loaded with toys and sweetmeats, to Ramsgate, two days after her return to England, and found Deb almost rosy; tumultuously glad to see Leah, of course, but too deeply engaged with a palace of dirt and oyster-shells that she

was erecting in Aunt Hepzibah's garden for the tortois-Hell cat to give more than lukewarm attention to the very costliest of the London presents.

"And when you come again bring the child nothing," said Aunt Hepzibah, a faded kindly woman, with eyes that spoke to Leah of her mother. "She loves you better than anything on earth. Don't spoil the love by making it mercenary. When you come, you bring yourself. Be sure that will always be joy enough for Deb."

Money of no use there; nay, it would seem a barrier rather between herself and the child's affection. Aunt Hepzibah's means were modest; she lived in a plain little house; dressed in old-fashioned black; kept one old servant. Leah, in her training silks, with her atmosphere of London life and frivolity, felt more and more out of her element each time she went to Ramsgate. And then Deb's questions, asked with Deb's



eyes upon her face, were in themselves not reassuring. "Was Leah happy? What, *quite* happy with Jack for a husband?" For Deb, as of old, displays what Montaigne calls the "*esprit primesautier*," going at the first bound to the core of things. "And had she forgotten Danton, and could she get no nicer friend in all England than ugly Lord Stair?" On one occasion his lordship had constituted himself Mrs. Chamberlayne's escort down the river. "Did Jack detest Lord Stair less than he used at Madame Bonchrétien's? And why had Leah taken to putting white dust on her face? Was it to look like Cousin Bell, or the other fine town lady they had talked of in Paris—Madame Tatters?"

Thus the little girl would prattle; while Leah, silent, ill at ease, felt that the child killed her with her talk, and gradually lost courage more and more for her visits to Aunt Hepzibah's cottage and to innocence.

So even her love for Deb, the one feeling that before her marriage served to keep her heart sweet, has in a manner been slain, and by her own suicidal hand. Reader, if this woman has failed to win your pity hitherto, refuse it not now; she has grown to shrink before a child's eyes — to dread a child's tongue!

A fortnight, three weeks, go by; at last, on the Sunday forenoon succeeding her explanation with Jack, Leah remembers with a start of remorse, that almost a month has passed without her paying Deb one visit. Shall she give up her hopes of meeting the Duchess at the Zoo, and spend the hot hours of the afternoon in Aunt Hepzibah's sea-side cottage and away from Babylon? It is her custom on Sunday morning to pursue Royalty with the mob to the chapel in Margaret Street. But to-day her heavy eyes turn reluctant from the light at the usual

hour of waking ; and by the time she has risen, pretended to breakfast, and dressed, it is past one o'clock. Too late to think of Ramsgate and Deb, even were one in spirits for the expedition. And then, there is her half-promise of meeting Lord Stair — as matters stand now, were it not an act well-nigh of self-destruction to risk incurring Lord Stair's displeasure? And while we live, must we not live ! Leah's head aches, her heart aches ; she wants the old panacea, excitement, to bring her round. Chloral, or whatever poison stood readiest on her dressing-table, yielded her as much sleep as comes within the reach of poisons, last night. Now, for the day's refreshment, she needs movement, admiration, flattery—I had almost written, needs Lord Stair. "And has Madame forgotten the Parisian dress and bonnet that the world has not seen?" suggests the consoling voice of Mademoiselle Melanie — Mademoiselle Melanie, anxious

for freedom to appear in *her* Parisian finery before *her* world. Put them on; with such amount of white dust, such slender administration of antimony as the occasion requires, order the carriage, and start—to Mrs. Baltimore's, as it is yet too early for the Zoo. Better an hour or so of Bell and Bell's philosophy than the companionship of her own thoughts, the remembrance of the words that came from Jack's lips last night.






## CHAPTER II.

### ROSE-COLOURED BLINDS.

BELL BALTIMORE inhabits a gewgaw little doll's house in Curzon Street. The flower-decked passage, the fountain in the conservatory, six feet by four, on the first landing, the prevalence of rose-colour, patchouli, and half-light advise you what order of hostess you may expect before penetrating to boudoir or drawing-room. The house belongs to Mr. Baltimore; so poor Bell lives rent-free, with a

couple of women servants for her retinue. "In my half-widowed position," she will tell you, her blue eyes suffused, "and considering Bob's immense expenses in Russia (a pair of gloves costs two roubles in St. Petersburg), I feel it a duty to economise. I try to make my nut-shell pretty. A little fresh chintz, and an occasional visit to Covent Garden Market do not ruin one. But I cannot entertain, and my friends know it. Whoever cares for me must care for me alone. Five o'clock tea is the beginning and the end of my hospitalities."

And this is true to the letter. Bell, having reached an age when even a pretty woman comes to acknowledge food as one of the substantial goods of human life, will accept dinners right and left—Richmond dinners, white-bait dinners, all dinners. She gives nothing. Deep hidden in the shrines of that cold heart, those who know her best affirm that the great god, Money, reigns



supreme; that not pleasure, dress, love of admiration, but a solid balance at her banker's, is the real motive power of Bell's seemingly butterfly existence. The accusation may be true or false. Towards herself, for certain, Mrs. Baltimore displays no grudging or parsimonious spirit. Wines of the best vinest, the earliest fruits and vegetables of the season, game when game is at its dearest—of all these does she partake without stint. "My health requires it," says Bell; that same plastic health that would not stand the cold of St. Petersburg, and required horse exercise at Scarborough! "It really does seem horribly selfish to order nice little dishes all for oneself, but I should starve on the diet that suffices for robust digestions. Good food is my medicine."

So, when Leah enters, on this particular Sunday, Bell is still in her own little morning-room, with the remains of "medicine," in the shape of a plate or two and an emptied

champagne bottle, pushed close on a small round table beside her sofa. Not even her most intimate female friends can number or catalogue Mrs. Baltimore's meals. Breakfast at ten ; at one, luncheon ; five o'clock tea ; dinner ; and, after ball or theatre, supper ; with early cups of chocolate, with tastes of liqueur, with glasses of wine and sandwiches innumerable. It is astonishing the quantity of eating and drinking that a delicate woman going the mill-round of hard-and-fast London life can get through ; more astonishing still, that she can at the same time consume morphia, chloral, or belladonna, at night, and live to tell you of it. But fashion, that subverts so much, seems able to subvert even physiological laws with impunity.

The blinds of Mrs. Baltimore's sanctum are thick, the atmosphere is perfumed ; Bell herself, all white embroidery and cambric, with a complexion like a girl's, and a knot of infantine blue ribbon in her blonde hair,



forms a spot of pleasant cool light amidst the deep crimson hangings of the room. But Leah's jaundiced sense detects the mould above the rose; ether amidst the millefleurs; the deathly pallor of fatigue under the rouge so cunningly employed to hide it; artifice—that artifice to which, at twenty years of age, she is herself fast drifting—everywhere. Never can she visit Bell Baltimore of a morning without reflecting that to *this*—ether and rouge, rose-lined blinds and satiety, will her present life lead her, just as swiftly, as irrevocably, as to death itself.

“Why, what a solemn Sunday face, my dear!” cries Bell, arranging herself upright among her cushions, with a pitying air of friendly criticism. “Anything worse than usual happened between you and Jack, or is it only the effect of your dress? The dress, I think. These ghastly new combinations of colour are a crucial trial to one's looks.”

The ghastly combination is citron, palely delicate as an April sunrise, relieved by sparing touches of warm chocolate maroon—a mixture strictly in accordance with nature's chromatic laws; the great Venetians show it us often on their canvasses, and one that sets off every charm of Leah's picturesque Eastern face to admiration.

“My costume is a work of art, Bell,” she remarks, with quiet certainty. Let heart, let conscience suffer as they will—impugn Leah's taste in millinery, and the master-instinct re-assert itself! “It is Worth's last creation, and came accompanied by an *autograph letter* from himself. But your curtains are so cruelly thick, it is impossible to judge of colour here. Oh, but I must, Bell! I am determined to make you a convert against your will.”

And before Mrs. Baltimore can stay her hand, Leah has drawn a curtain aside, and

the June sunshine sends in its flood of pitiless truth upon them both.

Mrs. Baltimore actually shudders under its contact. A woman who fights against age, converts light, air, sunshine, all the good friends of humanity, into enemies. Leah, in her pale, flawless beauty, stands calmly self-possessed.

"Now that you see things unbiassed by rose-colour, confess that my dress is a work of art, dear Bell?"

"It may be a work of art, but it makes the complexion look green," says Mrs. Baltimore, holding her position stoutly. The June sunshine may do its worst! In the face of the foe—I mean of her dearest friend—Bell will not retrograde an inch. "And I am quite sure English people are too uncultivated to appreciate it. Those startling contrasts may create a sensation at Trouville or Monaco. They will never meet with real success in London."

"It depends so much upon what people call a 'success,'" says Leah wearily, and quitting her place beside the window. "Exchange the word for 'notoriety,' and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, I suppose one would do pretty nearly as well as the other?"

"Perhaps. Talking of notoriety, what did you think of the parable of the Lyttons last night, or rather of Jack's commentaries thereupon? Had I been in your place, my dear child," says Bell, looking at her friend's face hard, "I cannot say that I should have felt cheerful, under the circumstances."

"It would be no easy thing to feel cheerful with a Hetty Robarts present," Leah answers evasively. "If it had not been for you, Bell, what spirits, what tempers we must all have sunk to—poor Jack especially."

"I believe I gave poor Jack one bit of sound advice," says Bell. "Not to venture on high tragedy without studying the part

well first. We have had a good many renderings of 'Othello' on the London stage—French, American, Italian. We have yet to see him interpreted by the implacable English husband of the nineteenth century!"

"Whoever plays Othello, do not cast me for Desdemona, please. Tragedy is quite as much out of my line of life as it is out of Jack's."

"*Tragedy!*" repeats Mrs. Baltimore, with that cold smile that ever trenches so nearly on a sneer. "I should say tragedy was done with for ever on the day you bade good-bye to the Rue Castiglione. Our good-looking tenor—what was his name, Leah? the man with a profile like Giuglini's, and an objectionable manner?—might have been capable of playing a tragic part, perhaps; but now—shall I tell you what you and Jack really remind me of, my dear? A pair of spoilt children perpetually quarrelling with each

other out of idleness, and because they have more pretty clothes, and toys, and sweetmeats than are good for them."

"Pretty clothes, and toys, and sweetmeats are scarcely enough, you see, to fill two grown-up people's lives."

"I am not so sure of that. Of course, the toy must be varied to suit different dispositions. One man has his yacht, another his seat in Parliament, a third philanthropy, a fourth a theatre. And, for us women—oh, the pretty clothes and sweetmeats are enough, I suppose, for us!"

"And you believe such an existence could ever be sufficient for happiness?"

"Happiness! Leah, you pay too much attention to your own pulse for health. That 'greatest happiness' question is one wise people let alone. We spend life, not in being happy, but in playing at being happy. Novels divert one's attention—or might do so, if they portrayed creatures of flesh and

blood, not heroines : or if novelists belonged to the world they try to describe—at all events, they keep one from that destroyer of one's good looks, thought. And dress would be an amusement, if the milliners did not take it so completely into their own hands. And then there is riding, till the Row gets too hot ; and yachting—no, I believe all sane human beings hate yachting the moment they find themselves out of smooth water. Pleasant little dinners, such as you gave us last night (minus Hetty), are, I fancy, about the highest, as they certainly are the most enduring, form of earthly enjoyment."

"Unfortunately, I have a marked distaste for little dinners," says Leah with a sigh.

"You will like them better as you grow older, my dear child. I remember the time when I looked upon an invitation to dinner very nearly in the light of an affront. And

now—now,” says Bell, with resignation, “I have learned to estimate most men and most things, little dinners included, at their just value.”

“And the end . . . the end of it all?” cries Leah, half passionately. “Dancing, dressing, yachting—as long as you take care to keep your barque in smooth water—the eternal Row, the eternal skating in the rink, and Richmond and Hurlingham! Oh, Bell! I say, what is the *end* of all this vapid, meaningless existence we lead—you and I, the worse for ourselves, like the rest?”

At the energy of Leah’s voice Mrs. Baltimore’s blue eyes open somewhat wider than their wont. “The end of it all, for me, is to be little dinners, we decided. For you——”

“Pray do not hesitate.”

“For you—let me reflect! Playing at sentiment, probably, for the next dozen years or so, until ‘the last words of the last



romance' are definitely spoken, a gradual subsidence, like mine, alas! towards the art of dining—provided always that your digestion lasts! People of bilious temperament have, it must be acknowledged, long odds against them in that matter of digestion——”

“And then?”

“Well, then — wrinkles, I assume, and whist. What other conclusion is there for any one? Talking of wrinkles, have you seen the beautiful Patty Addison since their return to town? My dear, the poor thing looks older than her mother! Not all the dress and cosmetics in the world can patch her up into youth any longer, and yet she has had the audacity to appear in a Charlotte Corday bonnet.”

And so on to scandal, and the dress-makers. When you have had half an hour of Bell Baltimore's philosophy, you have had a lifetime of it; just as, when you

have known one Bell Baltimore, you have known every other woman of her type.

Not much has that type altered during the last hundred years. "Metaphysics and flirtation," wrote the shrewd biographer of the Châtelets and the Espinasses. "Metaphysics and flirtation, systems of nature, fashion of dress-caps, vanity, curiosity, jealousy, atheism, rheumatism, bouts-rimés, noble sentiments, and rouge-pots."

Novel-reading may have taken the place of bouts-rimés; neuralgia, not rheumatism, be the malady in vogue; noble sentiments may have fallen into disuse. These are but variations of detail and the hour. The type of woman remains unchanged. What shall we say of the society, dining, dressing, pleasure-seeking, God-ignoring, to which she first owed her existence?



### CHAPTER III.

#### HER GRACE OF ST. IVES.

WE may say thus much, at least, that its creed and practice are logically consistent, its wisdom is justified of her children. "Love nothing, mourn for nothing. Eat, drink, sleep, and to-morrow *die*, expectant of the nihilism in which we have lived."

As Leah drives away from Curzon Street, something of this philosophy of despair animates her heart. The future that lies

before her, whether she again meet Danton or not—ah, that, like the “greatest happiness” question, is a matter well left alone.

To-day she will enjoy herself. The sky overhead is blue, and she is twenty, and her dress becomes her, and she will have Lord Stair’s homage to display before half London as usual. On to the Zoo, with hopes that some other excitement than a dual dinner at home may arise for the evening! Then, sleep arrived at as best one can, and her morning canter with Lord Stair in the Row, and the polo match—Lord Stair has promised to drive there with her and Jack, in the afternoon; and then engagements two deep (each including Lord Stair), for the evening. Is there time after all for the destroyer, thought, to vex one—time for more than skin-deep, transient suffering in a life of *pleasure* like this?

Lord Stair’s arm assists her from her carriage at the gates of the Zoological

Gardens ; Lord Stair whispers the reassuring news that the Duchess of St. Ives is already here, and without her daughter ; so that, if Mrs. Chamberlayne have still any inclination for the ball on the thirtieth——

“Any inclination !” cries Leah, with her bright cold gaiety, the Prince Charming’s very January sunshine. “Why, I have scarcely slept six winks for thinking of my coming grandeur. Fancy poor obscure me dancing in a quadrille made up of earls and marchionesses—perhaps, if I behave myself extraordinarily well, with that bulwark of all the rectitudes, Lady Violet McLagan for a vis-à-vis ! How can you ask such a question, Milor ? and what, in the name of everything absurd, makes you call me ‘Mrs. Chamberlayne’ with such an air of severity ?”

An inexperienced man might pardonably be led astray by her tone. But Lord Stair has learnt his lesson too well for any change

of mood in Leah to put him off his guard a second time.

"Whatever absurdity I may commit to-day, you are answerable for it," he answers. "In the first place, because I have carbonic acid on the brain—the result of a couple of hours' vain expectation of seeing you last night at the cotton people's. In the second—well, I have always considered you rather nice-looking as you know—but in that dress——"

"Tell me, if you think it a crucial trial to the complexion?" exclaims Leah with animation. "No; that question inevitably leads up to a compliment. Tell me honestly if my dress—Worth's last—is in good taste? I have been calling on Bell Baltimore, and she assured me, on her faith as a friend, that such an atrocious combination could never meet with success except at Trouville or Monaco."

"Poor Mrs. Baltimore! What compli-

ment of mine could be flattery as thorough as her dispraise! The dress is Worth's, Mrs. Chamberlayne—well, Leah, then, if you command it—and the wearer is . . . Leah!"

How much sweeter can truth be made than falsehood, in the hands of a competent artist! Leah blushes with pleasure at Lord Stair's reply; and thus blushing, and with her lovely face upturned to his, makes her appearance before the world, or such section of the world as is taking its pleasure, moult tristement, upon the well-baked turf of the Zoo, this Sunday afternoon.

And her success is beyond dispute. Never did prophetess, even in her own country prove falser than Bell Baltimore. Women look at Worth's last, and envy the wearer. Men look at the wearer, and envy Lord Stair. At every step she takes she gains an admirer, or loses a shred of reputation. Her success is genuine.

"And now for our Duchess," says Lord

Stair, when they have two or three times made the circuit of the lawn. "I pointed her out to you in Kensington Gardens, the other day, did I not?"

"A painted old lady, with closed eyelids, who gets up for sixteen? The difficulty is how to distinguish the Duchess of St. Ives from all the other less exalted old ladies with closed eyelids and paint, and who get up for sixteen!"

"The Duchess wears an eau de Nil dress," whispers Lord Stair, "and at this moment is standing not six yards ahead of us. Come, I will introduce you before Lady Violet and the McLagan appear on the scene. Lady Vi never loved me, even before she turned saint, and is not likely to extend a favouring hand to any of my friends. Indeed, you must not mind a little rude treatment from either mother or daughter. What we want is an invitation to the ball on the thirtieth, not politeness."



Need I enter upon a description of the well-known Dowager Duchess of St. Ives—friskiest of dowagers still, although with the marriage of Lady Vi to the great Glasgow whisky-lord the days of cakes and ale may be said to have passed? Ah, those palmy days, not to be spoken of now save in a whisper! Did ever duchess and her daughter enjoy themselves like these two? At one time seeing life behind the scenes of the London theatres, with the last handsome star or aspirant young actor in favour; at another, dancing, incognita, at the opera balls in Paris. Now shrimping, picturesquely barefoot, among the fisher-girls in the Scilly Isles or at Biarritz. Fast, popular, reckless as to men's respect or women's censure always!

The Duchess, née Mullins, must have possessed no common charms of person in her youth; and certain tricks of manner, certain ineradicable tossings of the head, and

gestures learnt before the glass, betray, her dearest friends suspect, an early acquaintance with the foot-lights. But on this point history is uncertain. She is quite an old woman now (alas! Lady Vi's fortieth birthday had struck before that wayward beauty consented to barter the splendid name of Fitz-Osborn against the siller of the McLagan), but keeps her threescore years at bay valiantly; wears tight-fitting waists, bonnets that would not misbecome a maiden of eighteen, and has her colouring attended to by the very first professional artists in enamel. At a due perspective, just until you hear the shrill old voice, or see the withered old complexion in a side light, you might mistake her Grace for a woman of eight-and-thirty still.

Lord Stair walks up to her, his hat in his hand — whatever the shortcomings of the inner man—the one finished Chesterfield, outwardly, that London society can show! He

has been an immense favourite for a good many years past with her Grace; and not, as yet, discerning that Leah is his companion, she receives him with all the smiles and airs of a juvenile coquette, extending three playful old primrose-coloured fingers for him to press.

"You are a bad man, Lord Stair. I vow I don't know whether you deserve to be spoken to. Pray how long is it since you have been to see me?"

"An eternity, judging by my own feelings," says Lord Stair; "but, in plain fact, less than a week. The fact is, you are cruel enough to shut your door upon me now," he adds, bending over her with an air of reproachful gallantry, and lowering his voice to a whisper. "In the old days——"

"Ah, don't talk to me of the old days," she interrupts him, with coy sprightliness. "In the old days you used to be a man

of exclusive tastes. You don't care for me or for my world now. Pray, who is our latest rival? Who is this little person with the Jewish profile whom you have promoted from the ranks?" For the Duchess of St. Ives, née Mullins, is conservative to the backbone, rigidly unbending on the score of birth and ancestry. Are not all chance-made greatnesses liable to the same weakness—the deceit of the eye "that when others come on they think themselves to go back!" "A Mrs. Chatterton, I am told, or Chancellor, or some such name?"

A less wary tactician might well be embarrassed by the situation, considering that the little person with the Jewish profile now stands within less than three yards of the Duchess. Lord Stair not only ignores that cause for embarrassment exists, but, in the coolest manner imaginable, presents Leah on the instant to her Grace. The daughter of

one of his oldest friends (Lord Stair first met Colonel Pascal, under Bonchrétien's roof, ten months ago in Paris). He, Lord Stair, has been wishing, ever since Mrs. Chamberlayne's arrival in town, for an opportunity of introducing her to the Duchess of St. Ives.

The Duchess of St. Ives glances through a thin chink of eyelid at Leah's fair young face ; then relaxes the muscles of her neck by about a third of an inch, and stares vacantly away, under the fringe of her parasol, at nothingness. Not an encouraging glance or bow ; but those who aspire to the slippery prize of Duchesses must risk many a stumble before that prize is reached. Leah stands calm, smiling, self-collected. The most hardened title-hunter in London could scarcely display airier callousness to slight than does Colonel Pascal's daughter at this moment. And her Mentor feels proud of her.

"One meets a horrible mob of people at

the Zoo," says the Duchess, addressing herself, pointedly, to Lord Stair. "In former days it was pleasant enough, but now you seem to run across your dressmaker's apprentices at every turn. We are not only educating our masters, it seems, but learning to associate with them. Pray, who are all these shocking creatures, Lord Stair? Come and take a turn, and divert me. I remember the time when I used to say there was no man in London whose *mauvaise langue* could divert me like Lord Stair's. But, of course, that belongs to the past."

She moves away, holding her parasol well between herself and the "dressmakers' apprentices," and, with Lord Stair in devoted attendance, commences her walk; Leah—who has really no alternative but to walk likewise—upon the side of the parasol. And so the world beholds them.

"Do you see, my love?" whispers Mr. Robarts to his Hetty; for it chances that

the Robartses form two units in the crowd of nobodies among the chairs. "Our cousin Leah is on the high road to ruin, doubtless, but her worst enemies must admit that she is going there in good style. You are aware, I hope, Hetty, that the high-rouged notability with whom Jack's wife is walking is the Dowager Duchess of St. Ives?"

"The Dowager—*Duchess*—of St. Ives!" stammers Hetty, feeling her very finger-ends tingle as she gives utterance to the honied, unfamiliar words.

"The real live Duchess of St. Ives, widow of the last, mother of the present Duke. Not, perhaps," says Mr. Robarts, "if history be true, an old lady whose antecedents would stand the strictest research—but that, Henrietta, is no business of yours or mine. Leniency towards the trifling sins of those above us in station is, I consider, a duty, and a very solemn one, too, in these all-levelling times."

"You may sneer at what others venerate, if you like, Mr. Robarts. Probably, if you had had the advantage of mixing from childhood with the aristocracy, you would show less of this small bitterness in speaking of them. For my own part," cries Hetty, with a burst of generous magnanimity, "I feel more and more disposed to think no evil of your cousin's wife. How is it possible for *me* to be a judge of her temptations? Brought suddenly forward, poor thing, from some fifth-rate class of society into the world, and without the inestimable blessing of a refined early training to hold her straight!"

"Your sentiments do you honour, my love. I hope you will stick to them, if at any future time our cousin's wife should fall upon dark days — an accident that may happen even with members of the aristocracy for one's friends. See, they are coming this way. Now, Henrietta, if we can only get Mrs. Chamberlayne to notice us, we shall



have it in our power to say that we have been bowed to by a near relation who was conversing on terms of intimacy with a duchess and a viscount."

But Mrs. Chamberlayne, it would seem, has no intention of noticing her Bayswater cousins from the exalted state in which she at present finds herself. She sees them, as she sees all other terrestrial objects, through a sort of halo. What should her mind really grasp and recognise save the one dazzling fact of her own position? She, Leah Pascal, the girl who ten months before wore darned stockings (three clean pairs a week), permitted to walk beside the parasol of a duchess!—a well white-washed old duchess, who attends Court christenings, heads subscription lists, gives away the prizes in industrial schools, and who, from her youth upward, has been able to set conventionalities, one might almost venture to say moralities, aside, at her pleasure!

They saunter to the extreme end of the lawn ; the expression of her Grace's roseate-tinted lips gradually relaxing under the influence of her companion's gallant speeches ; they retrace their footsteps ; ere long Lord Stair descries, in the direction of the bridge, the advancing figures of Lady Violet McLagan and her husband. And all this time not one syllable has the Duchess vouchsafed to speak to the little person with the Jewish profile, not one tangible step has been gained towards the goal of Leah's hopes, and of Lord Stair's manœuvring—an invitation for the Duchess's ball on the thirtieth.

Abruptly, without preamble, Lord Stair, like the veteran he is, surprises, and takes the position by a coup de main. When a woman, young or old, resolutely refuses to look at, or speak to, another woman, stealthy approaches, scientific undermining, are about as useful as they would be against the Rock of Gibraltar.

And still an adroit, unlooked-for stratagem may bring her to capitulate.

The Duchess of St. Ives really likes Lord Stair; as far as a Chloe of sixty can entertain such feelings towards a Daphnis twenty years her junior, I would say she has a weakness for him; and Daphnis not unmindful of the fact, resolves to turn this weakness to account.

Bending over her pleadingly, "You can afford, better than most women, to be generous," he whispers, with abrupt earnestness of tone. "For the sake—well, for the sake of the old friendship there has been between us, I want you to do me a favour. Invite Mrs. Chamberlayne and her husband to this ball you are giving on the thirtieth."

The Duchess of St. Ives' eyelids unclosed to their fullest extent.

"Mrs. Chamberlayne and her husband—who are they, pray?—where are they? I

have not the remotest idea what you are talking about."

"Mrs. Chamberlayne is—exactly on the other side of your parasol," says Lord Stair. "Her husband, to all intents and purposes, may be termed non-existent."

"A great pity the wife is not non-existent also! You ask me to do impossibilities. If these people were in any decent position, in spite of—well, in spite of the young woman's name being a great deal too much on men's tongues, Lord Stair, I might——"

"Duchess! It is unlike you to show such small feminine censoriousness."

"But I have not myself only to think of. Violet looks over my lists, and puts a cross against whatever names she chooses. I am getting an old woman; I cannot be at the trouble of arguing on subjects that don't interest me with Violet."

"And if, some fine day, Violet chose to strike out my name, it must go, I conclude?"

"I am not talking of old friends, or of people of my own world. Violet looks over the new names, and strikes out those she considers the most objectionable amongst them."

"The only objectionable quality Mrs. Chamberlayne can be said to possess is her beauty."

"Her what?" cries the old Duchess with tart asperity. Happily, the band is playing a deafening set of waltzes just at present, so the conversation does not reach Leah in its integrity. "Well, I used to think you, with all your sins, a man of discrimination. A poor, sallow-looking little Jewess girl like that a beauty!"

"To my own taste, most certainly not," answers Lord Stair, with brave unfaithfulness. "No women, as you know, are handsome in my eyes, save the fairest of the fair." The Duchess, in her youth, must have been a brilliant, reddish blonde; such,

at least, is the type aimed at now by her artists in perukes and enamel. "All the very young fellows at the clubs, I believe, consider Mrs. Chamberlayne good-looking, or it is the fashion of the moment for them to say so. For myself—the truth is, I have reasons that I will tell you of some day for wishing to help on her father's daughter if I can. And you are the one woman in London whom I would ask to give her a helping hand."

And the Duchess of St. Ives melts. Something in Lord Stair's voice has really set such remnant of a heart as the old coquette may be said to possess a-beating.

"I shall never get Vi to forgive me, or her husband either. If I followed my son-in-law's wishes, I should never invite any one but princes of the blood, and the family, to the hundreth cousin, of the McLagans. But upon my word, there will be such a crush, you might introduce your laundress and

no one be the wiser; and of course you can explain to these people that one chance invitation does *not* constitute an acquaintance."

And then she raises her parasol by an inch: she looks at Leah through a slightly wider chink of eyelid than upon their first introduction.

"You have not been long in town, Lord Stair tells me, Mrs. Chatterton, and it really is impossible for me to pay morning visits. However, if you like to dispense with formalities, I am giving a dance on the thirtieth, and shall be happy——"

There is not time for another syllable. Lady Violet and her husband have at this moment emerged from the crowd, not a dozen paces distant, and, almost before Lord Stair has been able to whisper his thanks, or get Leah safely out of the way of danger, the mother and daughter are standing by each other's side.

Lady Violet—that lovely Lady Violet for whose smiles all men once contended—is now a very faded flower indeed. Beauty, whose potency resides solely in rose-leaf lips and azure eyes at nineteen, is apt to be of the washed-out or sour type a score of years later on ; above all, when no cheerful ray of soul illumines it from within.

“We praise the fair,” runs the proverb, “according as our own market goes in it.” Lady Violet’s market has gone exceedingly ill. Look at the face and figure of the McLagan, as he walks beside her ! And she abhors and contemns that big fair of vanity wherein she had once hoped to drive so splendid a bargain matrimonial. Woe, if Lady Violet come across them, to the young and giddy crowd who still thread its mazes, full of hope for the future, and enjoyment of the present ! Woe, above all, to the reigning beauties of the hour — stars whose uprising serves but to render the



declension of Lady Violet McLagan the more apparent !

Lord Stair has got Leah a little clear of impending danger, but not so clear as to be wholly out of hearing ; and Lady Violet McLagan's voice is at once deliberate and piercing — a voice specially trained, one would say, for the utterance and emphasising of cruel speeches to her weaker sisters.

“ Who is that lady you have been walking about with, mother ? ” she asks brusquely. ‘ A Mrs. Chancellor, or Chatterton, or some such name. ’ So I imagined. ‘ And a friend of Lord Stair's. ’ So I also imagined. Don't you think you mistake in allowing yourself to be seen in public with these *doubtful-looking persons* ? ”

Leah hears every word of the remark as plainly as though it were addressed to her at first hand ; hears, and I doubt not will remember in days when Vanity Fair and its

jostling crowd, their ambitions and their rebuffs, shall have become to her like the faded pageants of a long-past fever dream.

“And this is my moment of triumph—solid, honourable triumph, Milor,” she cries gaily—yes, without a quiver of the lip. “Who could have guessed that the first taste of social success would be so sweet! A duke’s widow, under pressure, inviting—or rather, not forbidding—me to appear at her house! A duke’s daughter condescending to give an unfavourable criticism on my looks!”

“You must reckon Lady Violet McLagan’s adverse criticisms, like Mrs. Baltimore’s, as the sincerest flattery,” is Lord Stair’s answer. “Since the loss of her own beauty—when I was a lad, and you, Mrs. Chamberlayne, were just beginning to run alone, Lady Violet really was a beauty—she

has never been able to look another pretty woman in the face."

"I accept the apology in the same philosophic spirit as I did the invitation. Ah, Lord Stair, how much I owe you for all these blushing honours! If my poor papa were but here to witness them."

The world at large does evidently not only witness, but approve. During the next ten minutes Leah receives more gracious smiles from women's lips than have yet been accorded her during her London career. What Mrs. Chamberlayne is, what Mrs. Chamberlayne is likely to become—"Why, my dear friend, with such a husband as hers—quite lost, you know—and, with such an adviser as Lord Stair, *can* any good thing be looked for?—and an adventuress, or scarcely better, I am told, before her marriage. This Colonel Pascal (can any one tell me what regiment Colonel Pascal commanded?) mixed up, they say, in some kind of agency

in Paris. Still, I am never one to throw the first stone——”

At any one who floats sufficiently to be noticed of duchesses.

As for Hetty Robarts, her newly-aroused charity quite burns for an occasion of making itself practically felt.

“It will be an undoubted duty to ask the Chamberlaynes to dinner, Charles; indeed, the first invitation ought to have come from our house, not theirs. But really there seems a terrible difficulty in deciding whom to get to meet them, does there not?”

“We know a dean, of some kind or another, I believe,” answers Mr. Robarts, with his quiet obtuseness. “Perhaps Mrs. Chamberlayne would not mind, for once, putting up with so humble a dignitary. Still, when one is in the habit of walking about with duchesses——”

“A dean. To be edified by a few of

Jack Chamberlayne's little stories, I hope. You might as well propose at once to extend the party to Mrs. Baltimore."

"Mrs. Baltimore would be a congenial spirit to invite to meet the Duchess of St. Ives, if we could only soar sufficiently high to make her Grace's acquaintance."

"—— And what I was thinking was, we might ask Leah to come back and dine with us, unceremoniously, this evening. It avoids the necessity, for the time being, of inviting her husband. It gets us out of the difficulty of finding people to meet them——"

"But it involves our committing a mortal rudeness to a viscount," says Mr. Robarts, innocently. "Lord Stair, it is evident, is in attendance for the afternoon upon Mrs. Chamberlayne. How could you have the face to ask her, in his Lordship's hearing, to return with us to dinner?"

I must do Henrietta Robarts the justice

of saying that at this point she colours somewhat.

"I—I thought perhaps *you* might like to invite Lord Stair as well, Charles, dear," she remarks, with a touching little air of wifely diffidence. "Lord Stair is a most agreeable person when you come to converse with him. He knows a great number of my mamma's old friends——"

"And he calls our cousin's wife by her Christian name! No, no, Henrietta. Do not let your good-heartedness lead you into an action that your conscience might hereafter disapprove. Holding a certain set of strong opinions on Saturday night, how can it possibly be right to invite Lord Stair and Mrs. Chamberlayne to meet each other, at your own table, on Sunday?"

"I don't suppose our inviting, or not inviting them, would make much difference in the end, Charles."

"Ah, I see. The world is wicked, but

it does not come within our special province to be the world's reformers. Carry out your charitable intentions by all means, my love. We shall not have a very grand dinner to set before a viscount. Still, if moral considerations are set at rest, it is to be hoped the limited size of the turbot will not signify."

And a few minutes later, Hetty makes her way up to Leah with almost sisterly warmth. So glad to meet her, and looking so well, and such an exquisite dress. But here without Jack? Well, now, for Hetty's part, she considers Jack a very bad boy indeed for taking so little care of his wife. And on a Sunday, too! Mr. Robarts would no more let her go to the Zoo by herself——"

"Oh, but I have run about by myself ever since I was a small child," says Leah, with her ready, all-concealing frankness. "Think how I was brought up! Before I

was fourteen papa used to send me half over London to buy his cigars and lavender gloves. And then I have Lord Stair ; you did not see him ? Lord Stair looks after my welfare much more narrowly than Jack would."

"If I thought Jack would ever forgive me, I should like to carry you off with us to Inverness Road," cries Hetty. "Charles, would it not be delightful if we could persuade Leah to dine with us to-day, and Lord Stair ? Morning dress—oh, my lord, we shall all be in morning dress. I will listen to no excuses. You and I can go in the brougham, Leah, and have a nice long chat together—we positively *ought* to make each other's acquaintance—and Charles will follow with Lord Stair in your carriage."

Thus does Mrs. Robarts dig her first little trench around her viscount ; not without success. The prospect even of a Bayswater dinner seems brighter to Leah, in



her present state of mind, than a solitary evening spent with Jack. Lord Stair declares himself to be under Mrs. Chamberlayne's orders in all things. Finally, as the last notes of the national anthem swell through the Gardens, it comes to pass that Hetty is conducted "to our brougham," trembling with fear lest none of her friends should recognise her, upon the arm of Greatness.

Lenient to the trifling sins of those above us! The good little Pharisee could almost find it in her heart to forgive Bell Baltimore and her diamonds at this moment.





## CHAPTER IV.

### A RED-LETTER DAY.

**O**VER the dinner in Inverness Road we need not linger long.

Mrs. Chamberlayne and Lord Stair are not the only consumers of the limited turbot. Hetty prides herself upon the intellectual flavour of her impromptu Sunday gatherings, and has picked up two hack representatives of the world of pen-and-ink to grace her board to-day; a female fanatic in spectacles, who tortures poor Robarts by discussing

the theory of evolution from primordial germs, and a leading funny man of a leading funny paper, who never opens his mouth, save to fill it, from the beginning of the repast to its conclusion.

There are the accustomed cold entrées, and wretched pink champagne, and troupe of babies for dessert; the usual suppressed yawns in the fine, tasteless drawing-room when Hetty treats her guests to second-hand æsthetics, and boarding-school Beethoven after dinner.

To say that one dines with Mrs. Robarts, is to say all these things, without need of expansion. Are there not hundreds of Hettys, in Bayswater and elsewhere, and cannot every reader fill in the outlines of the sketch from dreary personal experience, unaided by shading of mine?

At half-past ten, to a moment, the celebrities, male and female, wish good-night, and start upon their different roads, on foot,

by omnibus, by underground rail. It would require a natural historian of the species to say, definitely, how the professional feeder-out makes his way back to his burrow. By the time eleven o'clock strikes, Lord Stair's face, as he stands behind the piano, turning over the pages of Hetty's symphonies, inspires even his fellow-martyr's heart with pity.

"Your music would be excuse sufficient for one forgetting time and everything belonging to it, Hetty." And, as she speaks, Leah rises from the side of Mrs. Robarts, whose peace of mind she has been steadily undermining throughout the evening. "But if Jack and I have one principle in common—I was nearly saying, if Jack and I have one principle left us—it is on the subject of keeping horses waiting in the night air—Sunday night air, especially. Lord Stair, it goes against my conscience to tear you away from Beethoven, but you know you

are under my commands, and duty is duty."

And now occurs a complication, trivial in outward seeming, and yet that is destined to give form and colour to the whole remaining portion of Leah's story. No horses have been kept waiting in the night air; no carriage was ordered to return to Bayswater at all! In accordance with Hetty's plan, the two ladies drove back from the Zoo together in the brougham, Lord Stair and Mr. Robarts in Mrs. Chamberlayne's Victoria. Upon Lord Stair, therefore, rests the blame of the oversight, if oversight it be. He does his best to look innocent, expresses remorse, contrition—the fact remains unaltered. No carriage has been ordered, and if Mrs. Chamberlayne intend to get back to Piccadilly to-night it will be well to see about something without delay—this is Lord Stair's practical suggestion—in the shape of a cab.

"A cab! No, indeed, my lord!" cries Hetty, shocked that a viscount should, in her house, be reduced to utter such a word. "We will send Leah back in our brougham, of course. Theophilus, my dear, ring the bell and bid James order Thomas to bring the brougham round at once."

Theophilus is the eldest Robarts boy, a pattern of his father in face and speech, and, at the age of ten, already seeing through and through the thin veneer of Hetty's character.

"You know you can never have the brougham after church-time on Sundays, mother." All the Robarts children have suppressed little methodical voices like old men. "Thomas says so. And Thomas is screwed. He broke the big dish going down the kitchen stairs." For, alas! in the present inchoate stage of Hetty's grandeur, Thomas, the supercilious coachman,

has to do butler at all smaller entertainments. "And cook means to leave."

Mr. Robarts pats his first-born with grim approval on the shoulder; Hetty colours a painful purple from brow to chin. Leah, with the never-failing Pascal tact, declares that a drive in a hansom on a moonlit summer night is just her very highest conception of earthly enjoyment.


"But alone, I mean, without Jack," hesitates poor Hetty, doubtful (in spite of her mamma's refined training) as to whether, in the highest circles, people think, or do not think, of the proprieties. "I am sure Charles would never hear—would you, Charles, love—of my entering a public vehicle alone!"

"Ah, but I am the very reverse of alone," says Leah. "Lord Stair is going to enjoy the public vehicle and the moonlight with me. If we find a hansom, we will drive. If we do not find one, we will walk. And,

either way, you may be quite sure no one will be in the least tempted to run away with us."

And so the matter is settled. Hetty would fain bid Theophilus order James to order Thomas to get a hansom ; but Leah insists upon being allowed to start upon her pilgrimage on foot. The charm of the hansom is its uncertainty. As likely as not, they will be forced to walk the whole way to Piccadilly ; any how, if misadventures of an exciting nature *should* befall her. Hetty will be sure to receive intelligence of her fate in the morning papers.

"—— And if we had not started when we did, I should have committed some act of desperation," she remarks, five minutes later, to Lord Stair. It is a soft summer night, delicious even in dusty Bayswater, and, arm-in-arm, Mrs. Chamberlayne and Lord Stair are sauntering slowly along, eastward through Queen's Gardens. "As I listened to the classical





symphonies, as I looked round the room at the oil paintings of Hetty, and the statuettes of Hetty, and the photographs of Hetty, I felt myself growing rapidly dangerous. A very little more, and I should have begun laying siege to Charles's heart in sheer self-defence."

"A lucky thing for Charles that we left."

"Poor creature! I don't look upon him as responsible for his actions. Bell Baltimore was right. Hetty, and the babies, and Beethoven, together, have brought Mr. Robarts, little as he knows it, to the verge of ruin."

"And we are to infer that his, that any man's moral equilibrium would be restored by Mrs. Chamberlayne's laying siege to him?" is Lord Stair's answer.

"Oh, all these things are comparative," says Leah, lightly. "To have siege laid to one by Mrs. Chamberlayne would be a sin

some degrees less heinous than wife-murder, would it not?"

"Difficult to say. I have no wife (happily for the wife) to murder, and I have certainly never had siege laid to me by Mrs. Chamberlayne. If a few people could, quietly and innocently, be put out of the way, and a few other people take their places, the world would be a much pleasanter one to live in than it is."

And, consciously or unconsciously, Lord Stair's arm presses closer upon the delicate little gloved hand that rests there.

"I should have to think that proposition over before I could assent to it," Leah remarks. "If a few people—say, Hetty Robarts—could be quietly put out of the way, and a few other people—say, Leah Chamberlayne—could take their place. . . . No, Lord Stair, I like the world infinitely better under the present dispensation, thank you."

"Under the present dispensation," re-

peats Lord Stair, more as though he were addressing himself than Leah; "loitering in the summer moonlight, and with Mrs. Chamberlayne, for once not in a cruel mood, at one's side! Yes, if such a state of things as this could last, the world would need extremely little reformation to convert it into Utopia, as far as I am concerned."

"Until you got tired of the moonlight and of Mrs. Chamberlayne together! You and I can, we do, support a good deal of each other's conversation, Milor, but always before an audience, always with the dress, or follies, or failures of our dearest friends supplying us with themes. Solitude, and moonlight, and Utopia, would soon exhaust our stock of ideas, depend upon it."

"I don't know that I would mind risking the experiment," says Lord Stair.

For a full minute, or more, Leah does not speak. Her eyes are looking away — far beyond these straight dull rows of London

pavement. The whole expression of her face has become serious under the influence of thoughts in which Lord Stair has, and knows he has, no part.

"The elixir of life, the charm of all our best hours, is uncertainty," she cries at last, returning with a visible effort, to herself and to her companion, "as I remarked to Hetty in respect of hansom cabs. I am looking well to-day, you say ; I am in high spirits, could laugh — did you hear how I laughed at dinner, even under the dead weight of Hetty and her authors ? Now I will tell you why. To-day, I know, is a turning-point in my life. My fate . . . . one cannot reason about these presentiments, one *feels* them . . . . trembles in the balance. I am like the gamblers, whose faces I used to watch at Monaco, when they had staked all on the last turn of the cards. Well, and it suits me. My queerly-strung nature thrives best on that sort of desperate excitement."

“About one thing, at least, there is no uncertainty, I hope,” says Lord Stair—“our friendship. Yes, Mrs. Chamberlayne, even after the lesson you read me last night, I have the courage to pronounce that word.”

His tone is grave, but as far removed as tone can be from sentiment. The hour, the loneliness, the softened beauty of Leah's upturned face, do not, for an instant, beguile Lord Stair from the path which he has chalked out for his footsteps to follow ; a path leading, he devoutly trusts, to far graver issues than any paltry gratification of vanity, any transient light comedy of conquest. For once Lord Stair's friendship for a woman is in earnest, terrible earnest ; the rehabilitation of his own lost life, the replenishment of his own empty coffers, staked upon its stability.

“Our friendship is, of all mortal relations, the most uncertain,” Leah answers, with re-

covered gaiety of manner. "That is just why we can endure to see each other so often. Any fine morning we may wake and know that we have seen our last. Your marriage, for instance——"

"Is precisely the one catastrophe that cannot happen."

"Every man thinks so—poor Mr. Robarts thought so, depend upon it—till his hour comes. Now Lady Stair would naturally be some blue-blooded patrician, with eyelids like the Duchess of St. Ives, and a distaste for doubtful-looking persons, like Lady Violet McLagan. And the doubtful-looking persons would not consider it an amusement to associate with her."

"My wife," says Lord Stair, carelessly, "as you insist upon my talking about such a myth—will be some well-gilded Miss Molasses, dug out of the inmost depths of the City. You cannot really imagine, Mrs. Chamberlayne, that I would surrender my

liberty from any other motive than starvation? Blue blood, black, yellow, any coloured blood, so long as it were tightly bound up in the great eating interests of the country, would do for me."

"To be sure. I recollect, when you first began my education in Paris, your telling me there were only two reliable instincts in human nature—vanity and hunger. Miss Molasses would marry your lordship from vanity."

"As I should most certainly marry Miss Molasses from hunger, Heaven help Miss Molasses!"

"Heaven help any woman who marries any man," says Leah. "Unless——" Her voice falters.

"Unless it be the man who loves her," finishes Lord Stair. "In which case, Heaven help her the more. She will need it. A man who loves, like these fathers of families, is capable of any crime."

“And men who do not love?”

“Commit indiscretions, no doubt, not crimes. If I loved a woman—I mean,” he corrects himself, “if fate ever rendered it possible for me to marry the woman I love—I should torture her with my jealousy. Torture her! As I told you last night, I believe I would kill her if she looked at any other fellow than myself.”

Leah laughs, a little uneasily.

“If I am anywhere in the way when you are courting Miss Molasses, it will be my duty to give her a hint or two as to these ferocious dispositions. At the same time, I must say I think you are mistaken, Milor. No crime bigger than what the Duchess of St. Ives calls the ‘mauvaise langue’ is in your nature.”

“Wait until you see me tried, Mrs. Chamberlayne.”

“Until Lady Stair, née Miss Molasses, takes to flirting?”



“Until the one woman the world holds for me, throws my friendship over, Leah.”

And something in the tone of Lord Stair’s voice conveys to the full as much a warning as a jest.

At the corner of Stanhope Terrace they come upon a cab-stand, and then follows their drive, for the most part a silent one, along the outskirts of the moonlit park to Piccadilly. Well, when they have arrived within thirty or forty yards of their destination, suddenly, Leah turns wise; bethinks herself that it would be prudent for Lord Stair to part from her here, rather than at the door of her own hotel. I use the word “wise” relatively. The caprice is about as baseless as that fatal one which prompted her, on the evening of her walk with Danton, to visit the *café chantant* in Paris.

"Don't think that, like John Gilpin's wife, I fear the neighbours," she tells him. "I am really influenced by the dictates of conscience. All Hetty's hints as to inefficient chaperons and public conveyances have come back, with a rush, upon my brain. To return home alone at midnight in a hansom is bad enough; still it is just one degree better than to return home at midnight in the same discreditable vehicle, *not* alone."

"I am listening to the first compliment that ever fell to me from your lips," says Lord Stair. "In the wintry days of gout and rheumatism to come, I shall be able to say that once, actually once in her life, Mrs. Chamberlayne regarded me as something of more consequence than a bouquet-holder or a walking-stick."

"Say rather," interrupts Leah, a little coldly, "that for once in her life, Mrs. Chamberlayne's common sense was perverted into fear of Mrs. Grundy by a course of

evil companionship! I retract my request, Milor, before it is made. See me home, by all means. If you will, come in and smoke a cigar of forgetfulness with Jack, afterwards."

But the driver has already received his signal through the trap-door in the roof; and before Leah has finished speaking, the hansom has stopped.

"To say good-night, or not, that is the question," cries Lord Stair, pushing back the door and half rising. "Command me, Mrs. Chamberlayne. Am I to go or stay?"

Piccadilly, just at this spot, is in shadow, as regards the moon; but the cab has pulled up in such a position beneath a lamp that the faces of Lord Stair and Leah are in a full blaze of gaslight. A pedestrian, advancing in either direction along the pavement, might recognise them easily, listen, almost, to their conversation, while he retained his own incognito.

"As we have taken the trouble to stop, good-night," says Leah. "Don't carry away my laces with you—thanks; and now what about this afternoon? It is too late, I suppose, to say, 'to-morrow?'" Lord Stair by this time has got down, and she is bending forth her head to speak to him. "The usual hour, I suppose?"

"The usual hour," answers Lord Stair, with that manner of his that "while saying naught, seems all to say" whenever he addresses a young and pretty woman. "Unless, of course, I receive contrary orders from you, meanwhile."

"Good-night, Milor. Hetty will be disappointed of her sensation paragraph in the papers. The day has been no turning-point in anybody's life, after all."

"It has been a red-letter day in my calendar," is Lord Stair's answer, "for I have spent it with you."

So they part. Lord Stair stands for a

moment, an expression that might well be construed into one of triumph round his lips ; then, crossing the road, saunters away through Green Park to his quarters in St. James's Street. And Leah returns home—such dreary mockery of a home as she may be said to possess.

The cabman holds out his arm, in its respectable Sunday black, her hand touches it lightly ; she springs down, she sees—ah, Heaven, and her heart stops beating—not a dozen yards distant from her in the moonlight, she sees the face of Danton !





## CHAPTER V.

### GAS-LIGHT IN JUNE.

FOR an instant both involuntarily stand still ; their eyes meeting as they met through the chill October darkness on the night when Leah was driving from Bonchrétien's house, a bride, beside Jack Chamberlayne. Then, with deliberation that accents his meaning but too well, M. Danton turns coolly on his heel and pursues his way ; and no choice remains to Leah but

to enter the hotel, with such strength as she may possess, alone.

She walks with heavy limbs, breathless, faltering, up the stairs, and at the door of the drawing-room finds her husband ready to bid her welcome. A smile of suspicious omen is round Jack's lips—a look that his wife knows is in his eyes, and he is perfectly—of Jack Chamberlayne one would be inclined to write unnaturally—sober; almost the only time Leah has seen him in this condition since that blue Roman morning when he insisted upon mastering the secrets of Deb's letter, six months ago.

"You are late, my dear; past twelve o'clock." Thus, with amicable tone, with grim politeness of manner, he receives her. "I was just beginning to speculate as to whether I should give you up finally or not."

"Give me up? Why, I have only been dining with the Robartses," she stammers.

"Getting through a duty that I thought you would gladly be spared. And Inverness Road is so far off; and Hetty gave us so much Beethoven; and oh, Jack, how cruelly hot you keep the rooms — all this gas-light in June! I declare no breath of air is ever allowed to enter when I am away."

Which remark yields a pretext for shading her face from the lamps (and from his scrutiny), also for crossing to a window, opening it, and standing there; while she struggles with all the power of will under her command, at least, for *outward* self-mastery. Vain essay, it would seem. Not a vestige of colour dawns on Leah's cheeks; her clammy hands tremble; her heart beats so violently, she feels that Jack has only to approach to hear its beats.

"I shall be better in a minute or two," she falters. "But the truth is, I ran too quickly up the stairs. Dr. Wentworth may be as



euphemistic as he likes . . . these fashionable doctors remind one of the French court, at which it was treason to pronounce the word 'death' . . . there *must* be something wrong at twenty years of age in having such a heart as mine."

Mr. Chamberlayne, with ostentatious care, shuts the door, lowers the flaring gas-lights, and comes across the room to his wife's side.

"You are looking pale, Leah, upset, I should say—if there could have been anything to upset you at the Robartses—but deuced handsome all the same. Stupid thing, I know, for a man to pay compliments to his own wife; but even a husband cannot help having eyes. Oh, come, you should not bear malice," for she has drawn away, with involuntary shrinking, from his tone. "I have been thinking over the little duel we had last night, and I am ready to allow I was wrong. Can a fellow be held to the

letter of what he says at three o'clock in the morning? You don't refuse to be friends, I suppose?"

But close though he stands to her, he never holds out his hand; his haggard face, despite its smiles, remains cold as ice. And still there is the look of which Leah has knowledge in his eyes.

"When did I ever bear malice, Jack?" As she speaks, Leah is sensible of astonishment—not that the voice she hears is unlike, but rather that it should resemble, ever so distantly, her own. "*I* refuse to be friends, who never sought to quarrel. Why, if it rested with me——"

"Everything in our joint lives would go smooth and pleasantly, I am sure," he interrupts, with cynical readiness. "It is my temper, my confounded unreasonable temper, that does the mischief. Well, we must hope better things for the future, Leah. There is no undoing the past for either of us, and

there is no good regretting circumstances that regret can't alter ; but perhaps it is not too late to turn over a new leaf yet. Will you sit down ?" Pushing over an easy chair as he speaks to his wife's side. "Or are you too much engrossed with the objects of extraordinary interest to be seen in Piccadilly?"

"A London street on a Sunday night is such a lively spectacle at all times," replies Leah, accepting his unwonted gallantry with as natural a manner as she can command. "Still, Piccadilly is Piccadilly, not Inverness Road. I am anxious to do my duty, Jack, as I have shown to-day, but I must confess that four consecutive hours of relations, and relations like Hetty, are beyond my strength."

Jack on this draws up another chair, in which he seats himself: so adjusting his position that his eyes are upon a direct mathematical level with his wife's.

"You did not go straight to Inverness Road when you first left this house, I believe."

He makes the remark less in the tone of a question than an assertion.

"When I first left this house I went to Curzon Street," answers Leah, promptly. Her courage by this time has come back to her—nay, has redoubled, as men's strength has been observed to do, after a morbid fashion, under the influence of strong bodily pain. "You have seen Bell Baltimore . . . . No? I thought you and Bell were in the habit of paying each other Sunday visits? Oh, Jack, and I committed such a crime—drew back a rose-coloured curtain and let the sun shine full on one of poor Bell's best morning complexions! My dear, all that the sanitary people tell us about keeping open the pores of the skin must be nonsense. Mrs. Baltimore is at least so thick in artificial coating;" Leah measures off an inappreciable

portion of an inch upon the tip of one slender gloved finger. "And still she lives."

Mr. Chamberlayne extends his 'two hands wide.

"And if Mrs. Baltimore were as thick as *that* in paste and paint, a great deal it would matter to me, would it not? Your cousin is about as true as the rest of the family, I suppose—complexion, heart, soul, everything?"

"Ah, Jack, and I used to look upon you as one of the few men living who believed in poor Bell!"

"I have no belief in any women," says Mr. Chamberlayne, with characteristic frankness. "For certain, not in the class that inhabit smart houses in Curzon Street. One does meet with honesty sometimes among the people the rest of the world won't shake hands with. But I always knew," he goes on, "how long our friendship for Bell Balti-

more was likely to last. She has served our purpose, I conclude; has got, or has not got us as many invitations as we expected. Now let her go, before her friendship or herself become inconvenient."

His tone is even more offensive than his words; but not a shade of colour deepens on his wife's cheek.

"The wind must be in the east," she remarks, quietly. "Nothing else could account for the general temper of the world to-day. Why, only think, Jack! among other unkind things, Bell pronounced my dress, which even Hetty Robarts had the civility to like, atrocious. You appreciate it, I hope, Mr. Chamberlayne, do you not?"

And standing up for a minute, Leah arranges her silken draperies to the best effect, then holds her well-poised head gracefully aloft for Jack's inspection.

He looks at her with an expression, evenly mixed, of admiration and hatred, an expression such as I believe no human face save that of a passionately jealous man ever wears.

“Appreciate? Yes, I do that, thoroughly, the dress and the wearer alike. Pray what other ‘appreciators’ besides Hetty Robarts and myself have you had to-day?”

Leah takes off her gloves, folds them into a little ball which she tosses on a neighbouring table, and begins to reckon on her fingers. Her master, it would seem, is bent upon her acting the farce out to the end. As well play her part with spirit! Jingle the bells gaily—how many hired jesters have had to do the same—although every sound they make sinks like a knell upon her heart!

“You would like a list of my appreciators—or rather the appreciators of M. Worth.

I take very little credit to myself in these matters. Well, Lord Stair first, of course——”

“Lord Stair first, of course!”

Jack pushes out his feet, folds his arms, and puts on an air of jocosity that becomes himself and the occasion ill.

“And Mr. Robarts, equally of course—I can tell you that I am very proud of my conquest over your cousin—and the usual foolish crowd of flutterers, young and old, at the Zoo. After I had left Bell’s house I drove to the Zoo, you know.”

“I did not know it, my dear, until you had the goodness to inform me of the fact.”

“Well, the afternoon had to be slaughtered, and the Zoo seemed as promising a means as any other. And Lord Stair met me there——”

“Naturally.”



“And introduced me . . . to whom do you think? I will give you three, I will give you thirty guesses, and you will never come right.”

“To Lady Jane Fuller, very likely.”

Lady Jane Fuller is about the fastest visited woman in London; probably one of the fastest women of any class in Europe. And Jack's tone infuses treble venom into the suggestion. But still Leah takes no offence. A man treading the path to the scaffold would scarcely be sensitive as to the rough stones or briar-pricks he might encounter upon the way.

“Lord Stair introduced me to some one fifty times bigger and more notorious than Lady Jane Fuller. You and I know a duchess, Jack. Her Grace of St. Ives allowed me to walk beside her parasol the whole length of the lawn at the Zoological, Lord Stair says, talked to me; but I must confess I think *that* embroidery. At all

events, we are invited to a ball at the ducal residence on the thirtieth."

Mr. Chamberlayne's face shows no gratification at the news. Let us credit even Jack with the scanty virtues he possesses. Although his father was a woolstapler, he cares not a straw for all the titles in London—would sooner walk down Regent Street with a strolling actor than a prince, provided the strolling actor were of tastes more congenial to his own.

"The thirtieth," he remarks, sullenly. "And pray what authority have you to accept any invitation for me? Who told you that I mean to remain in town until the thirtieth?"

"Nothing would please me better than to go away," is Leah's answer. "I said so to you last night, but you did not seem inclined to take me at my word."

"Last night is not to-day. A great many unexpected things may have sprung to life

during the last twenty-four hours—your affection for Hetty Robarts, for instance. After leaving the Zoological, you tell me, you spent the remainder of the evening at Bayswater?”

And now Leah, for the first time, perceives the drift of his questions. She is not playing out a farce, but undergoing an inquisition.

“The question appears to require a deal of thinking over,” repeats Jack, “yet I should have thought it was put in plain enough language. After leaving the Zoo, you spent the remainder of the day at Bayswater?”

“I went back with the Robartses to dinner, as I told you. Hetty must have seen me walking with the Duchess, I conclude, or possibly Lord Stair was the attraction, for she asked Lord Stair as well. And we met a celebrated funny man who was not funny at all, and a creature in spectacles who declared herself to be lineally descended from

lichens, casual germs, sparks, protoplasms, and gorillas.”

“And after you left the Robartses?” persists Jack, with never a smile upon his lips. “You had got conveniently rid of the carriage and servants, I know—don’t think I want to lay a trap for you. The carriage was dismissed between six and seven o’clock this afternoon.”

But now the blood leaps up, with one hot blaze, into Leah’s face.

“If you have been questioning the servants, pray pursue the same plan still,” she exclaims. “Ask Mr. and Mrs. Robarts at what time I left their house, and under what circumstances. You see the hour at which I arrived here”—she glances across his shoulder at a time-piece—“and can form any conclusion respecting my actions that suits you best.”

But Jack is no more swayed by her warmth than by her indifference. A man lightly

jealous may be lightly shamed out of his suspicions; not so one in whom jealousy has grown to be an integral portion of existence—bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, till death them shall part.

“I would question my servants”—she notes a marked emphasis on the word ‘my’—“or Mr. Robarts, or any other person with whom I am acquainted, if it served my purpose to do so. Of that you may be sure. At present it is my pleasure to question you, only. After you left the Robartses’ house you returned here alone at midnight in a hansom?”

“Lord Stair was with me. It was better surely, at such an hour, to have Lord Stair’s escort than none?”

“You are a fitter judge than I can be on that point. Let us keep to facts, not to questions of expediency. Lord Stair came with you in a hansom, you say, from Charles Robarts’s house to this hotel?”

"If you insist upon having the narrative in detail, you shall have it. Only," and Leah yawns piteously, "it is getting late on Monday morning, and the narrative, like the occurrences of which it treats, is so stupid! When we started from the Robartses' house we walked. Hansoms, it appears, do not reside in the neighbourhood of Inverness Road; and you know, ever since the small-pox panic, I will not enter a four-wheeler on principle——"

Between his teeth, Jack Chamberlayne gives utterance to a malediction, comprehensive and deep, on *all* principles.

"So we were obliged to proceed on foot as far as Uxbridge Road—stay, let me be accurate to a hair's breadth—the corner of Stanhope Terrace. There we found a hansom, and drove back, the moon shining bright, along Hyde Park Terrace, Connaught Place, and through Park Lane to Piccadilly."

"Straight to the door of this hotel?"

"No. When we were about fifty yards distant, just by that great Italian warehouse, you remember——"

"I remember nothing but what you choose to recall to me."

"I was weak enough to feel frightened ; not, of course, of you, Jack—how could you possibly be angry with me?—but of the other people in the hotel—the servants. I don't rightly know what I was frightened at. At all events, I bade Lord Stair good-night, then and there, set him down, and drove on to this house by myself."

After her confession comes silence, broken at the end of another minute by Jack's voice, harsh and tremulous with barely-repressed passion.

"I don't think much of oaths at the best of times—women's oaths especially—yet I can hardly believe you would perjure yourself for such a bagatelle as this. Will you

declare to me, solemnly, that every word you have just uttered is true?"

The muscles of his miserable face work with agitation ; his lips are bloodless. Impossible for Jack Chamberlayne to dissemble long ; the best or the worst of the man—the worst especially—you must *see*. No acting, no jingling of the bells, for more than a minute together with poor Jack !

"You are a boy, my dear, and a very foolish one," says Leah, gently. "What object could I have in not telling you the truth about the spending of a very dull Sunday ? I committed an error, if you like, in not remembering to order the carriage ; and my dinner at the Robartses, and my little bit of fancied grandeur at the Zoo, may—as I had no special leave of absence from you—have been errors likewise. Still, whatever misdeeds I may be guilty of, you must admit that my present prostrate condition more than atones for them."



And she rises, and with a tired, slow step, turns round in the direction of the outer door, and away from Jack.

With a movement like lightning he has intercepted her escape, has grasped her roughly by the wrist.

“And you think, after the conversation we had last night, I am going to rest satisfied so easily—to be gulled by witty small-talk about duchesses, lichens, and gorillas? Answer me one thing, Mrs. Chamberlayne; have you, or have you not, seen M. Danton—‘the only man in this desolate world you can call a friend’—to-day? And answer truly. Take the soundest advice that has ever been given you in your life yet, and answer truly.”

His eyes have a cruel light in them, like those of some savage animal; the foam stands upon his lips. And Leah turns cold with terror.

I have spoken of her moral nature as born

again, purged in the fire of repentance over forfeited love. I have said that, with newly-opened eyes, she beholds things in the outward as in the spiritual world to which, in the old days of narrow self-absorption, she was blind—among others, the beauty of truth. But, physically, Leah is weak as ever. How should a morbidly-strung set of nerves, a defective circulation, improve under the thousand poisonous influences of a London season? And prevarication occurs to her at this moment by the working of a law as potent as that which causes the hare to double, or the poor little hard-hunted beetle to dissemble death.

“The wives of merciless savages,” says a writer on the genesis of our race, “must have prospered in nice proportion to their power of disguising their feelings, of interpreting, and so escaping, the rising passions of their husbands. Hence, from the perpetual exercise of this power, and the

survival of those having most of it, we may infer its establishment as a feminine faculty."

Gentlemen who employ force in the regulation of their household affairs would do wisely to ponder over the meaning these words contain.

"I don't know what you are talking about, Jack. M. Danton—is he not in Paris? I think you are choosing a strange time for such a jest. 'Have I seen M. Danton to-day?' What in the world can have put such an idea into your head?"

And she laughs, about as naturally as Fatima may have done when she was nerving herself to return the guilt-stained keys to her lord.

"You would like to know, would you?" cries Bluebeard. "Well, I will tell you. Your own fine show of candour put it there. While you have been running about the town with my Lord Stair—degrading your-

self and me in pursuit of duchesses and their invitations—I have been quietly sitting at home thinking over the little confidences you reposed in me last night. ‘M. Danton coming to London, or so you fancied you had been told, and we must consider what kind of hospitality we should show him on his arrival.’ The fellow is here *now*. My common sense tells me he is, but you had not the honesty to say so. Oh, you will not go yet,” for she has made a faint attempt to free her wrist from his grasp. “We will not wish each other good-night until you have answered my question, and on oath, mind. You have prejudices—no wonder!—against oaths, as you told me that morning in Rome. Oaths may remind one, with unpleasant force, of perjuries. Still, we must all of us perform duties sometimes that jar upon the taste. On your oath, have you, or have you not, spoken to your old sweetheart to-day?”

*Spoken !* Yes ; sharpened though Jack's intelligence may be by passion, he is no lawyer ; and in this unwitting substitution of one word for another, Leah sees a loophole whereby to escape, without injury to conscience, from his cross-examination.

"If by my old sweetheart, and he was never that, you mean, M. Danton, I declare to you, most solemnly, that I have never spoken to M. Danton since our wedding-day. I am not very sure that I spoke to him then."

"I wish you to take your oath, if you please. Solemn declarations go for nothing where a woman is concerned."

"If I intended to deceive you at all, I certainly should not care much about the pattern of the deceit," says Leah. "A declaration or an oath would be just the same to me. Oh, Jack, have pity ! Your hands are stronger than mine, remember," glancing down with a piteous little sigh at the slender

wrist that his cold fingers imprison so cruelly.

He looks at her doggedly, ferociously ; measuring, as far as his capacities allow, their respective strength—realizing, it may be, how immeasurably he is the weaker in any conflict where muscles do *not* avail.

“On your solemn oath, before Heaven, you assert that you have never spoken to Danton since the day you married me ?”

“On my oath, as you insist upon so many useless forms, I assert that I have never spoken to M. Danton since the day I married you.”

“And have received no communication from him ?”

“None ; unless you call two or three dead violets”—and Leah’s face turns to marble—“you ground them under your heel that morning in Rome, you recollect—a communication.”

“Ah !”

Profoundest incredulity, rather than any sense of relief, is conveyed by this monosyllable. However, Jack loosens his hold upon his wife's wrist; he turns sullenly away. Believe her or not, nothing more than an oath can he by possibility extract from Leah in her present mood; and that marble hue that has newly overspread her face is one Mr. Chamberlayne likes ill.

"And now, if the inquisition is over, I suppose I may go?" she asks him, placidly. "Sunday is a strain upon one's nerves always, but to-day, what with the Zoo, and the duchess, and Hetty and her authors—"

"You may go to — for anything I care," shrieks her lord, in his piercing falsetto. "As to my inquisition, as you have the good taste to call it, I may as well remind you, perhaps, of one more fact before we separate. If you have deceived me, if there is any reading between the lines in that oath of yours, you have foresworn

yourself, as far as I am concerned, for the last time. Speak to that scoundrel Danton, hear from him, see him, and you know the rest. The same roof does not shelter us for another twelve hours."

Leah looks at her husband steadily while he pronounces his ultimatum, then she smiles.

"You said the same thing to me last night, my dear Jack, and it really is not a pretty thing to have to listen to. Please don't repeat it so often. I am gifted by nature with a fair memory, and, you may be sure, am not likely to forget any of your friendly hints."

And then she makes him a little reverence—for Leah is her father's daughter in this, that she forgets outward courtesy seldom—and goes away, to commune with her own heart, and in her chamber, and be still.





## CHAPTER VI.

### SWEETS FROM LORD STAIR.

IN the good old days of chivalry, domestic dramas like the one whose course we are following, were apt to be comprised in a single act. A difference of opinion this evening: by to-morrow's light the dagger or bowl, with short shrift to the victim, and no embarrassing after-results as regarded the victor's status in society.

Such rude lynch justice has of course disappeared amidst the refinements of a higher

civilization. Our nineteenth-century Bluebeard may take his wife by the throat overnight; on the following morning may set well-trained eyes to watch her comings and goings; but none the less will he be seen with her in the park that afternoon in a smart new clarence, perhaps his last attention to Mrs. Bluebeard, and with a rosebud or lily adjusted by Fatima's own fair fingers, in his button-hole.

Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne meet at their late breakfast on Monday morning. They drive down to Hurlingham, happily relieved by Lord Stair's society after luncheon, in outward seeming as united a domestic trio as any other in Vanity's great fair. They even show—rare occurrence—in the same theatre-box at night. And so things go on the next day, and the next: the breach between man and wife hourly widening, but the world perceiving no sign thereof, nay, some members of the world

actually beginning to speak with hope of the young couple's prospects—"Jack Chamberlayne returning to such small senses as he may possess at last, or Mrs. Chamberlayne, who has never lost her senses at all, keeping her eyes with increased steadiness upon the hundred thousand pounds of the future." What are the probabilities, as matters stand, of Chamberlayne living to inherit? What the after-probabilities of his widow re-marrying in a twelvemonth, and *whom*? Men learned in the 'logic of chance make bets on the subject ; some even going so far as to offer odds as to the double event.

To Leah it is the time most fraught with suffering of her whole existence. Not for fear's sake alone. She has grown to dread her husband with a terror that saps her strength like real bodily disease ; the thought of his possible violence—not merely to herself—pursues her day and night. The cruel,

weak face, the eyes with that red light in them, follow her from park to theatre, from theatre to ball. She shudders at his footsteps; starts from such uncertain snatches of sleep as the racket of her lot allows, bathed in cold sweats, or crying upon the name she never utters in her waking hours, to save her.

But this physical terror, this constant haunting sense of coming evil, is not all. She is crushed beneath a new and burning form of self-abasement: sickens under the knowledge that Danton is in London, breathes the same air that she breathes, treads the same streets, is shone on by the same mocking June sunshine, yet despises herself and the life to which she has sunk too much to seek to aid her. For him to stay away may be her salvation; but hearts mortally stricken are apt to be illogical, and salvation so bought seems blacker than the lowest depth of despair. And she would

be content with so little. Let him leave a formal card at her hotel, send her a message through Deb (more than once she knows he has gone to visit Deb at Ramsgate); give a single sign of interest in her fate, or forgiveness of the past, and she would ask no more. And still the days wear on; the day of the Duchess of St. Ives' ball draws near, and she hears, sees nothing, of him.

Lord Stair, an habitual finder-out, by tortuous means, of other men's movements, has ascertained long ago the fact of Danton's arrival in London, and at well-chosen seasons, with language whose delicate framing precludes the possibility of offence, speaks of him to Leah. Has M. Danton become proud; does his hospital work so engross him that he cannot remember his old friends of the Rue Castiglione; or is it Madame Danton—Leah, of course, has not forgotten Mr. Pettingall's legend on that theme—

who occupies his thoughts? The wife dead—ah! then so much is lessened of the mystery. Danton is prosecuting some new love affair—the kind of fellow who could no more support life's burthen without a love affair than without a cigarette between his lips. And we know how much leisure a man in love has for friendship! With other suggestions of a like kind; suggestions which in spite of herself compel Leah's attention, set her thinking when she is alone, on graver subjects than the outside carelessness of the words would seem to justify.

A fair sprinkling of human follies are committed, doubtless, under the influence of passion—a large number out of imagined self-interest. An overwhelming proportion, I would say, take their birth from precisely the state of feverish moral unrest to which Leah Chamberlayne has sunk—a state in which *any* movement seems preferable to the

torture of enforced inaction—*any* outward support, no matter the hand from which it comes, worth clutching at.

She has been smitten by an incurable wound that she will carry to her death-bed; the man who once loved her, and whom she injured, has taken the cruelest of all reprisals—neglect. Lord Stair never neglects her for a day, an hour. Her husband is indifferent to her—parades his worse than indifference before the world. Lord Stair is willing to throw over the world for her sake—givers of entertainments, not a few, begin to see that it is vain to invite his lordship to their houses, unless the name of Mrs. Chamberlayne be on their visiting lists. Attentive to every trifle that can yield her interest, forestalling her smallest wishes, never overstepping the boundary-line of friendship, and yet contriving to show, without becoming ridiculous by the demonstration, how painful are the restraints he has laid upon himself,

how can Lord Stair fail to become the strongest influence of Leah's life? She fears him, yet looks to him as a defence against her fears, loves him little as ever, yet in his society finds her readiest means of forgetting love and all that she has lost with it. In a word, she needs him—needs *something*, I should rather say, being human, beyond, stronger than her own worn-out heart, her own chafing conscience — and this something, by unhappy accident, is Lord Stair.

“And if I saw as other people see,” Jack remarks to her, with his usual candour, “you and Lord Stair would probably never open your lips to each other again. But I am not quite so weak, even under the influence of the finest amateur acting in London, as to mistake the blind for the reality.”

The evening of the long-looked-for thirtieth has arrived at last, and Deb Pascal is



seated at dessert with Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne. Aunt Hepzibah is staying for a couple of days in town on business, and Deb, extatically happy, has spent the afternoon with Leah. No restraint is the child's presence upon Mr. Chamberlayne's freedom of speech. Lord Stair *and his friendship*; well whitewashed duchesses, their character, the honour conferred by their patronage; husbands, wives, and the universal misery of marriage—on all these subjects has Jack been holding forth, with perfectly unchecked warmth and trenchancy during dinner; Deb, her eyes wide open, following, as far as her keen child's intelligence and fair child's soul can be said to "follow" such a preacher on such themes.

"Lord Stair has grown generous in his old age, Jack. He gave me a great big paper of sugar-plums when he called to-day; and do you know what I did as soon as Leah and I were alone in the Park? I threw

them, not where other children could pick them up, but so that I might see the wheels of the carriage *scrunch* over them. Sweets from Lord Stair! How could I tell they were not filled with nice little doses of prussic acid or strychnine, instead of liqueur!"

Jack heaps the child's plate approvingly with sweetmeats from a neighbouring dish, remarking, as he does so, that she is at full liberty to throw them through the window, if she has doubts as to the honourableness of his intentions.


"Oh, Jack Chamberlayne and Lord Stair would never go the same way to work about anything—even about poisoning one," says Deb, promptly. "As I flung away Milor's bonbons, I am quite safe in eating Jack's—don't you think so, Leah?"

"I think that you have not the virtue of gratitude, Deb," is Leah's answer. "Do you

know how long it has taken you to decide whether you will, or will not, look upon Lord Stair as an ogre? Rather more than eight months, my dear. You made his acquaintance at Madame Bonchrétien's, the end of last September. It is now June, and——”

“And the child is honest, keeps to her first impressions, as I do to mine,” interrupts Mr. Chamberlayne. “I considered, and told you, in Paris, that Lord Stair was too much your companion for your own good, and said a great deal more to you than you ought to listen to. I think so still—only with a difference. What that difference is, I leave to you to guess.”

“Why, to be sure, Leah is married now!” cries Deb; poor Debbie, longing to be peace-maker, yet hesitating on which side to throw in the weight of her small influence. “Lord Stair couldn't win Leah away from you now, if he tried ever so, Jack.”



"Of course not, my dear," says Jack, with grotesque amiability. "Once married, and a wife's heart becomes her husband's property for life, does it not, Deb?"

"I am sure no one's heart could ever belong to Lord Stair," Deb answers, not inappositely.

For a little space Leah remains silent after the child's remark. Then she rises from the table, she crosses, as if under the sway of some sudden impulse, to her husband's side.

"Jack, I wonder whether there is any earthly consideration, any bribe I could offer, that would make you come with me to the ball to night? I suppose not. You have always engagements of your own, now."

And she rests her hand — a fevered, trembling hand it is—upon his shoulder.

"Yes, we each choose our own way free enough," says Jack; but he hangs his head, he does not lift his eyes to his wife's.

"As to my going with you to-night, the request is an absurdity. A vast deal you need the presence of a husband, among all your fine viscounts and duchesses."

"I need you awfully," she answers, "as I never needed anything in my life before. I—I am turning giddy, I believe, as one does at a great height. I remember feeling so that November day we climbed to the top of Milan Cathedral. I want a hand to steady me. That hand ought to be yours."

At this Jack Chamberlayne raises his head, and stares at his wife, fairly bewildered. His eyes are glazed with wine, no doubt; when are they not so glazed? His perceptions, at no time bright, do not discern the strange eagerness of her expression—the intensity that gives such pathos to her voice.

"Milan Cathedral! It would be better taste in you, I think, not to allude to that

cursed Italian tour of ours, before the child, at all events. How the dickens am I to know what you are driving at by Milan Cathedral? If you feel giddy, as you call it, it will be in the middle of a waltz, I suppose. You will have my Lord Stair's arm to steady you."

"Don't talk so much of Lord Stair," she cries, with a shudder. "Take me, just for once, to be sincere, and talk of ourselves. I want you, and no one in the world but you to be my escort to-night. Come, I don't often ask you a favour, and this"—she attempts to smile, but fails—"is not such a disagreeable one to fulfil. I don't look uglier than usual, do I, Deb?" And Leah retreats a step, in order that her husband may the better view her in her shining beauty. She has planned to go to the opera on her road, so is in her ball-dress already, a white dress, like a bride's, with diamonds gleaming from her hair, and

on her throat and wrists. "Jack would have no great cause to feel ashamed when he entered the Duchess's ball-room, with me upon his arm?"

"Ashamed!" cries Debbie, jumping up, and making little circuits of admiration round Leah's flowing skirts. "I should rather say not! I am sure Jack will be the proudest man in London if he only goes with you to the ball to-night, Leah."

"You are thinking of fairy princes and their brides, child," remarks Leah. "People are not proud of each other, out of story books, now-a-days."

"People, out of story-books, must consider how much they have got to be proud of," says Jack Chamberlayne, in his querulous voice. "To my mind, a man whose father was a woolstapler can have no particular cause for pride in rising, through his wife's good looks, to a class above his own. I, at least, do not intend to put myself in

such a position. 'Mr. Chamberlayne—and who is Mr. Chamberlayne?' asks one impertinent eye-glassed idiot of the other. 'Ah—I understand. The husband of Mrs. Chamberlayne, *the* Mrs. Chamberlayne! Who is permitted, on sufferance, to mingle with the Duchess of St. Ives's guests, through Lord Stair's influence.'

"Say one word, Jack, in good hearty earnest, and I will give up the ball with pleasure, and the Duchess too."

"And Lord Stair into the bargain, and all *your other conquests* with him."

At the intonation of his voice Leah turns sharply aside, a flush of the old passionate colour rising to her cheek. Then her emotion, whatever may have been its source, dies away, and she rests her hand again on Jack's arm: she makes her final appeal to him.

"Grant me this one favour, perhaps the last I may ever ask of you. Come with me!



You are dressed already." Contrary to his habit, Mr. Chamberlayne has dined in elaborate evening dress. "It would cost you no more trouble to come than to stay away."

"No; and you look so nice, dear Jack," cries Deb, tremulously, for though she has sufficient feminine insight to know that a compliment can seldom be misplaced, the child cannot but mark the growing sullenness of dear Jack's face. "Such beautiful embroidery," stroking the front of his shirt with her small fingers, "and enamelled studs, and a flower, even, in your button-hole."

Jack pushes her roughly aside. "I'm not in a humour for all this fooling," he exclaims. "You are learning to be a woman too fast, Miss Pascal, learning to cajole and flatter and be false, like the rest. As to going with you," addressing himself to Leah, "the thing is impossible, even if I wished it,

and I don't wish it. I am engaged to an evening party, as it is."

"To an evening party, Jack—you!"

"To an evening party, Mrs. Chamberlayne—me! You have your engagements, I mine. And as far as respectability goes," cries Jack, with his hollow, spiritless laugh, "I would back one society against the other, any day—Lady Violets, Dowager-Duchesses, Earls, Viscounts, and the rest of the quality included."

"Aunt Hepzibah says the Duchess is not respectable at all," observes Deb, undaunted by her former failure. It is not in Deb's nature to remain a neutral spectator of any conflict, and her acute child's instinct tells her—how, or why, Deb would be at a loss to explain—that she best espouses Leah's cause by ranging herself against the "quality," and on the side of Jack. "Aunt Hepzibah knows all the histories of high people, because Uncle Nathan used to lend them money,

and when I told her Leah was invited to the great Duchess of St. Ives', she said I might as well hold my tongue about that, for that the Duchess was no respectabler than she need be. A bird of the same feather—I'm sure she must be a pretty Duchess, if that is true—as Lord Stair."

Leah's face has become whiter and whiter; its expression more fixed. Unheeding Deb's chatter, she stands at her husband's side, still watching him steadfastly.

"One hears—in the old days I used to read—of repentance at the eleventh hour, Jack. This may be the eleventh hour for you and me. There may be time for repentance yet. My going out to-night can do no one any good—can yours?"

"I left off thinking of 'good,' one morning in Rome, Mrs. Chamberlayne," is his answer, promptly given. "My going out to-night may amuse me, possibly, and staying at home could only drive me desperate.

However this may be, I mean to go."

"Come to the opera first, show yourself with me for once, and go to your own engagements afterwards."

Jack starts from his chair, with an oath that makes little Deb cower away, terror-stricken.

"Be seen with you for once! I know too well what that means," he exclaims. "A husband who is seen as the companion of his wife's frivolities is held by the world to countenance them. I have not sunk to that yet. If you had chosen," he goes on, "yes even since we came back to London, things might have been different. You had only to do your duty, to promise solemnly never to speak again to an acquaintance of whom I disapproved, and I would have been your companion where and as often as you liked."

For a moment Leah hesitates, as though she were struggling with herself for mastery,

then she turns quietly away from him. "It was a promise you had no right to exact." This she says with a certain sad dignity, unrecognised by Mr. Chamberlayne. "Either I was worthy of all your belief or of none! Why will you persist in harping always on that string? The person . . . of whom you speak"—her lips can never approach the mention of Danton's name without a quiver—"he has passed for ever out of your life, and out of mine."

"And Lord Stair has no rival! I congratulate Lord Stair upon his good fortune."

They are the blackest words that ever issued from Jack Chamberlayne's mouth. It may be that he is himself sensible of their blackness, for he quits the room without another look in the direction of his wife's face—a couple of minutes later is driving away as fast as a hansom cab can bear him from the hotel.

"Debbie," says Leah, holding forth her hands to her sister, "you have had but a sorrowful treat, child, and I meant to-day to have been one of pleasure to you. But Jack has a hasty temper, and I am afraid I don't quite understand how to conciliate him. You need not think the fault lies on his side, not even if some day you hear people say so. Jack might have been a very different person if he had not married me."

"And what might you have been if you had not married Jack?" says Deb, keeping her tears back bravely, lest they should fall on Leah's ball dress, but with a look of pain that betokens more than tears in her deep eyes. "I don't want to say anything against Jack, now he is my brother-in-law; and I think he does *right* to hate Lord Stair; but if, long ago, before ever you met him, you had known Danton——"

"Hush, Debbie—hush!" says Leah, turning her bloodless face from the child's gaze.

"The past is done with, my dear; those Paris days just as much as the old times—do you remember them? when we used to plan to turn gipsies, you and I and Naomi, and live among the woods and commons, away from debts, and money, and papa! Well, and we must make the best we can of the present. I have a good deal to be thankful for. Jack has been very generous to me, and to all of us, and . . . and I think you must not stay with me any longer to-night, Deb," she interrupts herself, with a tremble in her voice that Deb hereafter remembers. "Hannah has been waiting since before dinner, and you know what Aunt Hepzibah's principles are about late hours and dissipation."

Aunt Hepzibah puts up at a commercial inn close to St. Paul's. So, in the company of the old servant, the child has a three-mile drive through the lighted streets before her—a prospect impossible for Deb's mind.

to contemplate without brightening. "I have enjoyed everything in my day," she cries, throwing her arms around Leah's neck, "except a certain person's sweets, and I am not afraid of poor Jack—only when he swears very loud. Give Jack my love to-morrow morning, if he will take it; and Leah—there is just one thing I want you to say before I go: tell me that the bouquet on your dressing-table does not come from Lord Stair? I asked Melanie, but she only shook her head and looked wise. And I know—I know," says Deb, with jealous wistfulness, "that it must be from someone who has learnt how to *flatter* you cleverly; for all the flowers you like—white violets, Gloire de Dijon roses—all are in it. Don't wear that bouquet to-night, Leah, if it came from Lord Stair!"

But Leah does not, or will not, hear the request. She busies herself in putting on Deb's hat and jacket; begins messages,



which she does not remember to finish, to Aunt Hepzibah; talks of coming down soon to Ramsgate and having a long afternoon, she and Deb together, shell hunting. And then, when the time for parting comes, her courage seems abruptly to forsake her. She clasps her cold hands together, stands for a moment irresolute; finally, with disregard of tules and flounces, sinks down at the child's side, and rests her cheek against hers, as she was wont to do before her marriage—in the times when Deb was sick and suffering, she the comforter.

“My dear,” she whispers, very low, bringing out each syllable with effort, “do you remember to say your prayers at night, like you used?”

Debbie lifts her head in simple amazement at such a question. “Say my prayers? Yes, indeed, I say them, Leah—morning and evening, without missing. Of course, now I am living in a hotel,” adds Deb,

rigidly truthful in the smallest detail, "they may be ever so little shorter than they are at Ramsgate. I can't get my prayers so well together, here in London, as I can at home."

"Say a prayer for me, to-night," Leah falters, with a sob. "I need it."





## CHAPTER VII.

### A WHISPER IN THE CROWD.

I HAVE shown elsewhere that the devotion, tender and true, of Lord Stair to Mrs. Chamberlayne is based upon securer grounds than those of sentiment or vanity; that the rehabilitation of his own lost life, the replenishment of his own empty coffers, are in reality staked upon its continuance.

But I am far from saying that Lord Stair's conscience—that exercise of reason which he,

in his language, would term the "highest prudential motive" — has ever admitted to himself the actual nature of his hopes.

Few men, save in the soliloquies of the stage, utter their cherished designs aloud ; and ignoble purposes, like many other ugly things, lose half their deformity so long as they are permitted to remain abstractions. Mrs. Chamberlayne's is the prettiest face of the season. What wonder, his forty years notwithstanding, that he should surrender himself to the credulous enjoyment of her smiles? And Jack, good, honest little lad, bears about with him a forfeited life—with *that* fact can neither the baseness nor the nobility of friends have aught to say. Jack's days, poor fellow, are numbered ! A hundred thousand pounds will be his widow's dowry ; and he, Lord Stair, accidentally possesses knowledge which 'tis wise and delicate policy to keep secret.

As much as this Lord Stair, the man of the world, may have conceded to Lord Stair, the Iago, in those still moments when the Two Voices make themselves heard in the worst as in the best of us—no more. And still do the risks and uncertainties of his position fret him, keep him from sleeping—on one or two occasions positively interfere with his capacity for dinner. The veteran Lothario, for the first time in his life, hard hit, say those of his acquaintance who know him best ; and with reason ! For it is the first time in Lothario's life that his chances of ruling a woman's will and of becoming master over a hundred thousand pounds have been united.

So when, from his place in the stalls, he watches Mrs. Chamberlayne enter her box, a bouquet that he recognizes in her hand, a close observer might note a curiously blent expression cross Lord Stair's face. Every gambler is superstitious, let his game be the

running of a horse, the extension of an empire, or only the winning of a woman's "yes." Lord Stair, who believes in nothing, believes in presentiments. Quietly listening to Patti during the first act of the 'Barbiere,' he has been thinking, not of Rosina, not of the crowded opera-house, but of the one engrossing subject earth holds for him, himself, and, half unconsciously, has resolved to stake his hopes upon an omen.

If Leah enter the theatre without his bouquet, his gods are against him. Let him make up his mind to accept their enmity with resignation; waste time no longer on the will-o'-the-wisp pursuit of fortune dependent on such frail chances as a man's last will and testament, or a coquette's caprice! If she wear them—if she wear them, let him take heart of grace, speak boldly, as he has never done before, and to-night. At pretty speeches, as he proved long ago, Leah laughs; to sentiment, or its language, a

remembrance keen as death makes her invulnerable. Wounded pride, humiliation under neglect, these must be his allies. Not from sympathy with his cause, but in despairing revolt against her own life, must she be brought—if, indeed, she ever shall be brought, to listen to him ! Surprising into what humiliating positions the vainest men are sometimes pressed by the irresistible logic of their own sorry actions.

He waits patiently until Rosina is again on the scene, then makes his appearance in Mrs. Chamberlayne's box, with that quiet air of assurance to which the world's eyes are now pretty well used, and almost in silence they listen to the music ; such silence as human beings are prone to keep when questions of gravest moment, of liking or of hating, weigh on their minds. A word of Leah's gives Lord Stair the opening for which he seeks. The curtain has fallen on the second act, and Patti has been thrice

recalled before the footlights, and the brand-new tenor from La Scala, who is singing with her, and the contralto, and the basso, according to the wearisome custom of the London stage; and fans begin to flutter, and flirtations to awaken round the asphyxiated house.

"I have not thanked you for my bouquet, Milor, assuming always that it came from you? Deb remarked that the sender understood the art of clever flattery. Certainly, he must have had some magic knowledge of my tastes." And as she speaks, Leah raises the bouquet to her face. "I think every flower I like best in the world is gathered together here."

"I am in no danger of forgetting Mrs. Chamberlayne's likes or dislikes," is Lord Stair's answer, "even in so small a matter as Gloire de Dijon roses." Then he adds, quickly, and in a voice so grave that Leah cannot choose but turn to him: "That



bouquet plays a more important part in the ruling of my destiny than you can guess at. If you had chanced to leave it on your dressing-table, I should have started for Paris by the 7.40 train to-morrow morning. Oh, I am quite in earnest, Mrs. Chamberlayne. I have my superstitions, like other people; and if you had refused to wear my flowers, my mind was fully made up as to wishing England and everything it contains a tolerably long good-bye."

"What dire events from trivial causes spring!' England to lose Lord Stair through sin of mine! But you need not have been afraid," she adds. "No one need doubt my accepting any good thing of life that comes into my hands; flowers, like these, most of all."

"Unless others that you happened to prefer had forestalled them. And I had good reason to dread rivalry." Lord Stair says this carelessly, as a man not measuring

his words ; but his eyes never for an instant cease to watch her face. "Jack was strolling about in Covent Garden, at the same hour as myself, this morning, and the magnificence of the bouquet I saw him choose might well have thrown my humble offering into the shade."

"Jack . . . is evidently beginning to care for ladies' society at last," answers Leah, a little distantly. "Deb and I did our best to make him come with me to-night, but in vain. We brought him, indeed, after much persecution, to acknowledge that he was engaged to a ball elsewhere ; and when one couples that with the fact of his ordering bouquets——"

"—— Engaged to a ball, elsewhere?" interrupts Lord Stair, as though the idea had only just recurred to him. "Why, of course he is. Jack told me about it himself. Engaged to a ball at Miss Madge Hathaway's, and half the young fellows of his

age in London with him. And the bouquet, equally of course, was for his fair hostess. I might have thought of that at the time."

In a second, the light he knows, the light he wished to evoke, comes into Leah's eyes. She utters never a word; but her very silence, her silence and the cold compression of her lips, tell Lord Stair that he has struck home.

"There is really no pleasanter house of its kind, than Miss Hathaway's," he goes on presently; "and you meet every one there! I have an invitation for to-night, myself—if I can get away early enough from Fitz-Osborne House. And I can assure you, Mrs. Chamberlayne, people fight for an invitation to one of Madge's balls! She is as popular a little woman as any in town. She is hospitable to a fault——"

"—— She is an actress!" exclaims Leah, with chill emphasis. "Oh, I know quite well

who Miss Hathaway is. I have seen her." Once or twice of late, Jack Chamberlayne has, in truth, been driven by Miss Hathaway in her pony carriage about the parks. "As regards Mr. Chamberlayne, he may or may not think it good taste to keep up his bachelor acquaintance with these theatrical characters; but unless you and I want to quarrel, Lord Stair, it is a subject, I think, which had best never be spoken of between us again."

And here, Reader, I must, in justice, pause; having a higher eulogium to pass upon the theatrical character than Lord Stair has done. Do you not meet "every one" at a house like Lady Jane Fuller's? Does not "every one" fight for an invitation from the Duchess of St. Ives?

Miss Madge Hathaway (to call her by her play-bill name) is, in her domestic relations, a woman by whom many a fine lady of fashion might take pattern; but a

Bohemian to the finger tips: estimating whitewash at its intrinsic value; aping few virtues, though possessing many; accepting bouquets and adulation from men at whom she laughs as freely as though she were a denizen of Mayfair itself; ready to drive Jack Chamberlayne, or Jack Anybody, in her pony-carriage to-day, yet resenting it not if he refrain from lifting his hat to her in his wife's presence to-morrow. A brave frank-hearted little human creature, taking all swift advantage of the hours, making the most of youth and pleasure while they last, but at the same time working valiantly at the hard profession to which she was born, and supporting two or three worthless relations, and an idle husband whom she adores, out of her earnings.

And yet Leah, who has ever looked upon the influence of Bell Baltimore over poor Jack as a saving one, considers that he has committed a sin unpardonable in accept-

ing an invitation to Madge Hathaway's house; an opinion which, I fear, would remain unchanged, could every noble action of the little actress's life be laid bare before her. At her calmest times Leah can feel with greater strength than she can reason, and to-night, with body and mind both off their balance, she is just in the state when air-light trifles can be taken as deadliest premeditated wrongs, and resented with all the illogical unforgiveness of despair.

Lord Stair perceives the advantage he has gained, and is not slow to make the most of it. She judges her husband—surely she judges him too harshly—remember Jack's age, the irresistible force of early associations! Like all other young men, now-a-days, he has got a taste for Bohemianism that better influences seem unable to cure. And yet—— “And yet,” exclaims Jack's generous advocate, a ring of feeling that almost sounds like nature in his voice,

“when I think of such a man possessing the most priceless treasure earth can yield, possessing you, and able to find interest still in the society of actresses and singing girls—quarrel with me, Mrs. Chamberlayne, if you will, yet this once I must speak—my blood boils with indignation !”

Leah turns her face aside in silence ; not moved, as Lord Stair may, doubtless, imagine, by *his* eloquence, but by the passionate bitterness of her own thoughts. Ere she can recover herself enough to answer, he has spoken again ; hurriedly, with genuine agitation, genuine eagerness. May not the vital chances of Lord Stair’s life, his prospect of a beggared old age or of a golden one, depend upon her reception of his words ?

“I am a ruined man, as you know, Mrs. Chamberlayne, a man without much hope or good of any kind left in him ; and still, if you were free—now, or years hence—if

you were free, and would share my poverty while you accepted my devotion, I believe, on my soul, that I should be a different fellow to what I have ever been yet, and make you happy."

"Happy?" repeats Leah, and looks at him—oh, with what a smile upon her lips! "We have wandered in these regions of romance before, have we not? Utopia and moonlight, and now it seems poverty, as the ultimate destiny of the two most worldly people in London! Don't you think we had better attend a little to Rosina? Pathetic warblings sound more appropriate behind the footlights than in the boxes."

With this reply Lord Stair must, perforce, content himself; and still he holds his omen to have proved trustworthy. For Leah has listened to him. Very few men rise superior to the teaching of their school; and, according to Lord Stair's philosophy, the woman who listens, hesitates. Now if destiny but



befriend him . . . Destiny ! A man's own steady will *is* destiny. He has worked the game out hitherto, move by move, as he had planned it. From what unsuspected quarter should checkmate overtake him at the last ? Not very long shall Lord Stair remain unenlightened on this point.

The opera over, Mrs. Chamberlayne quits her box on his arm. It is a subscription night, and every lobby and passage is filled to overflowing with that least supportable of crowds, an upper ten thousand mob.

Well, as she passes along, crushed and crushing, it chances that Leah hears her own name spoken — by whose tongue she knows not, will never know — her name, then Jack's ; and then a few words of biting commentary, just such as you would look to hear amidst an upper ten thousand mob, upon the prospects, future and actual, of both.

The speaker, a woman, is one of those who call a spade a spade and Roland a fripon. And, clear as the writing on the Babylonian palace wall, Leah, with a start, sees her marriage—aye, and the hidden depths of her own soul, *as the world sees them*. A premonition that saves? Oh, Reader, a premonition that more often leads the other way. Once know the fairness of your name to be irrevocably maligned, and scarce one human being out of fifty but will be tempted, in time, to make the falsehood good.

And this is the goal of her ambitious hopes! Flattered, sought after, and as a necessary result calumniated, a leader of fashion, upon her road at this moment to the most exclusive house in London—a present rich in fruition, with every reasonable promise of a morrow more golden still. For these ends and no other did she, a girl of twenty, put sweet human love away out of her heart, and offer herself, a willing

sacrifice, at the altar of Mammon. Such triumphs had she in view on that October night in Paris when she essayed Jack Chamberlayne's diamonds, with little Deb for audience; the night when, dressed in her old brown silk, penniless still, save in prospect, innocent, so far, at least, as she was ignorant of better things, she first met Danton.

Danton . . . . They have by this time emerged from the heated opera-house into the air. Denser than ever is the crush; uncertain at their present rate of progress seems the chance of reaching the Duchess of St. Ives' ball-room by midnight, if then. At length, after patient endurance of a few more minutes' buffeting, Lord Stair proposes that he shall make his way quickly down the line of carriages in search of Mrs. Chamberlayne's brougham, leaving her, if she does not fear being left, alone amidst the crowd.

“Mrs. Chamberlayne fears nothing in the universe,” cries Leah with a laugh. Since she heard the whisper of that unknown tongue it seems as though a new forlorn courage had indeed taken possession of her. “If you should be lost altogether, Lord Stair—tragic supposition!—I daresay some other good Samaritan would come to my side.”

A man strolling along the pavement, a cigarette between his lips, turns round shortly at her voice.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### CHECKMATE !

**F**ROM budding time to blossoming. Reader, has it happened to you to mark the effects upon yourself of that transition? You journey forth into the country some buoyant April evening, perhaps after sickness has long held you prisoner to the blank dreariness of bricks and mortar, and find a world fresh dyed. Every tree and meadow stippled over with fairy touches of emerald, clouds of scarce-opened white upon

the thorn, pale daffodils and primroses, the sisterhood that comes "before the swallow dares," along the banks, the birds piping forth their untuned love-notes on the air whose crispness still bespeaks a touch of east wind. Colours, odours, sounds, all move you to a delight so keen it borders upon pain, not so much for what *is*, as for what is coming. Well, and you go back to town; at the end of three or four weeks of hot sunshine, return. The trees are in broad leaf, the grassfields ripening for the mower; the hawthorn already shows a hectic blush; the birds' notes have grown sweeter, mellower; the east wind is gone, and gone the delight that thrilled your heart like pain. The buds have blossomed; promise has become fulfilment.

Just such an effect may be wrought upon a man by the beauty of the woman whom he loved and last saw as a girl. That beauty may be heightened by art, softened through the

grace that comes with knowledge of life; its bloom of incompleteness, the first wild charm of promise, has vanished for ever. Danton, for it is he, stops short; in a second Leah recognizes him, their hands have met and they stand looking at each other, silent, pale, forgetful of all conventional forms of greeting; stand as two inhabitants of the same country might do, who, after long years of separation, should abruptly find themselves face to face upon a foreign shore.

“I was determined not to let you escape this time you see, M. Danton.” So Leah at length addresses him, with a forced little tone of banter, in one of those set little phrases to which a woman of the world instinctively resorts when she finds herself betrayed into some position where she has to feel as a human being, not act as a puppet. “After the determined way you cut me the other night in Piccadilly, I hardly knew if I should venture——”

"I could never, under any circumstances, wish to cut Mrs. Chamberlayne," remarks Danton. Coldly self-possessed is his voice, distant his manner to her. Jack himself, if he were present, could scarce find ground of offence. "As to the other night in Piccadilly—surely, Mrs. Chamberlayne, I acted discreetly in passing on my way without seeking your recognition?"

"And you have been hearing Patti, of course?" In her confusion, Leah does not remark how little Danton's dress bespeaks attendance at the opera. "Did she not sing divinely? And what do you think of this new Italian tenor we are all wild about? And was not the house full; and—and why have you never come to call upon us all this time, M. Danton?"

Her lips quiver as they give utterance to these incoherencies; her face is blanched to the hue it wore on that last evening of farewells in the atelier. But Danton feels no



spark of mercy for her. Months ago, when he used to read scraps of her letters to the children, when he pictured her weary, heart-sick, alone in Italy with Jack Chamberlayne, his heart at times would melt, almost into forgiveness of her treachery towards himself. Four weeks ago, when he first arrived in London, white cheeks, quivering lips and fluttering confusion might have touched him only too acutely. Not now. On that night when Lord Stair parted from her in Piccadilly, Danton gained one true glimpse, as he believed, into her life; on that night he formed conclusions not widely different from the whispers of the crowd as to her outlook for the future. How should he feel pity for a woman like this! A coquette, not by instinct, as in her girlhood, but of calculation; one who, as a necessary art, must *know* how to assume tearful eyes and trembling lips at will; and who now, for a whim, an impulse, a passing "caprice de grande dame,"

would fain lure back him, the poor discarded lover of old days, to swell her list of conquests, fan more important jealousy, or serve whatever other end may suit the frivolous purpose of the moment best !

“I have no money to spend upon opera tickets, Mrs. Chamberlayne ; you might have spared me the humiliation of such an avowal. Without seeking far, too, you might divine why I have not called on you and your husband. Look !” and holding out his arm, Danton displays the sleeve of a somewhat threadbare morning jacket. “One cannot pay stately visits of ceremony in a coat that ‘shows the white thread,’ as Madame Bonchrétien used to say.”

Stately visits of ceremony ! She turns from him, a choking sensation in her throat, a mingled sense of humiliation and disappointment holding her dumb, and sees the tall figure of Lord Stair approaching at two or three yards’ distance through the crowd.

. . . . . A sufficiently vivid contrast the two men present at this moment: Lord Stair in his ne plus ultra of evening dress, his embroidered linen, scientifically cut coat, his button-hole flower, his gloves, and with a flush of exultation upon his usually impassive face; Danton pale, obscure, poorly dressed, a "social failure" now as in the time, long years ago, when Madeleine deserted him.

"Your carriage is found, Leah!" Lightly Lord Stair speaks her name; little Lord Stair thinks that he has spoken it for the last time in this world! "But I am afraid it will be a question of the mountain and Mahomet if you intend to reach Fitz-Osborne House to-night. Now, if you would not mind walking sixty or seventy yards, you—you——;" the fluency suddenly dying out of his utterance as he discovers that Leah is not alone. "M. Danton, I have the honour of wishing you a very good evening." And Lord Stair lifts his hat with courtesy, a well-bred player on

life's great chess-board, even under the first smart of "mate" so overwhelming as this which has overtaken him.

Danton returns the salutation in silence ; at the same time makes a movement as though he would pass along his road. What business, in truth, has he here? What interest for him have the actions, capricious or sincere, of this woman whom he was weak enough once to love? Weak enough *once* ! whom he has not strength of will, even now, as she stands before him in her diamonds and (as he holds it) her falseness, to sever wholly from his heart.

"I have a few more words that I should like to say to you, M. Danton," she cries, in that faltering, broken voice he remembers. "And you, Lord Stair, will you make my excuses to the Duchess of St. Ives, if indeed she remembers my existence enough to notice my absence? I am not feeling well; the

heat, the crowd have been too much for me ; and I shall ask M. Danton to see me to my carriage."

And in far less time than it takes me to write, she has turned from Lord Stair *for ever* ; has rested her hand, with a little gesture of appealing that it would indeed require stern philosophy to repulse, upon Danton's arm.





## CHAPTER IX.

FOR THIS ONCE.

FOR a moment George Francis Lord Stair stands like a man transfixed—a moment only; then his happy, ever-ready “knack of irrelevance” comes back to him; the situation in all its bearings stands clear before his mind.

It has been well remarked that the promptest judges of human action and motive are generally those whose habits of thought do not lead them to see too far.

Lord Stair can see precisely as far as Lord Stair's own forty years' dealing with his kind may serve to enlighten him. Women, by natural infirmity, are capricious, hysterical; actresses from their cradles. Before marriage, or afterwards, if they do not love you, or if they do love you (the last especially), unreliability is about the only quality they possess that can be relied on. These are his theories, generally applicable to women at large, but never more so than to this individual woman who at the present moment has befooled him.

A man of wider capacities might easily fall into the error of suspecting the meeting with Danton to be planned, or at least premeditated. Lord Stair suspects nothing of the kind. He sees the truth, as far as outward facts are concerned, in its naked cynical reality. Bored, listless, stung into passion by her husband's neglect, restlessly seeking for any new emotion, Leah was

brought to listen to his own "eloquence," one short hour ago. Bored, listless, recklessly seeking for any new emotion, she is ready to listen to the rough reproaches of a man like Danton, now. Arrived at the pinnacle of notoriety for which she has striven; upon her road to the house that she has been moving heaven and earth to enter; covered with the Chamberlayne diamonds, and with his, Lord Stair's, flowers in her hand; could anything be more exquisitely reasonless, more picturesquely unlooked for, and therefore probable, than that she should give up *all* for the sake of spending five romantic minutes on the arm of this lover in rags, whom she jilted, without a scruple, before her marriage?

What will be the sequel to the caprice—ah, and what his own line of conduct, his own reprisals? These are matters Milor can consider over at his leisure in the Duchess of St. Ives' ball room. I speak only of the facts



of the immediate situation—such material facts as can be seen and handled—and I repeat that Lord Stair grasps them with an impartiality, a decision, that do him credit.

“Ill? my dear Mrs. Chamberlayne I am exceedingly grieved to hear it. These sudden illnesses are always so alarming:” an accent just sufficient to point his meaning upon the word “sudden.” “Now what had I better say to Jack about it? In these matters it is well to be prepared. I shall be sure to see your husband by-and-by at Miss Hathaway’s. Will it be wise to tell him——?”

“It will be wise to tell him the truth,” cries Leah, and her eyes meet Lord Stair’s, with an expression such as he has never read in them before. “Jack is not given to undue nervousness. Tell him simply that I felt faint——”

“And that, by good fortune, I was able to leave you in the excellent professional care

of M. Danton? Under all circumstances, you may depend upon my sending Jack home at as early an hour as I can." Lord Stair's manner, as he takes upon himself this friendly errand, is really a model of delicate breeding; the manner of a man to whom a "scene" is worse than a sin; strong feeling, or its expression, an outrage against every received canon of decent taste. "You are making some stay in town, I presume, M. Danton? Have come to England to reside! Ah, indeed. Then I trust we shall have the pleasure, ere long, of meeting. Mrs. Chamberlayne, I shall hope to hear better accounts of you to-morrow morning."

And lifting his hat, with quiet unconcern, to them both, Lord Stair disappears amidst the crowd, his face impassive as on that evening when Leah found him drinking Madame's Sunday punch before the fire; the evening when she declared that no old love

could ever by possibility arise—a Nemesis—against her !

And once again, unlooked-for chance upon this side the grave, she and Danton are alone. Lord Stair converted into an implacable enemy, her husband's long-threatened justice a thing assured ! Yes, but what matters this—or the losing of the world and all it contains, for the matter of that ? Her world, with its tawdry joys, its poor ambitions, *is* lost. She realizes that fact vaguely, but feels no pang of regret over their loss. The crowd, the carriages, the lights—London itself, exist not, as far as Leah's self-absorbed mind is concerned, during the next few seconds of time. She only lives in the universe ; she, and one other human being ; and the stars shine somewhere overhead, as they did that night in the avenue of the Champs Elysées, and life, while those seconds last, is sweet.

“ I don't know what you will think of me

for giving you all this trouble, but I was glad of an excuse for escaping . . . another ball . . . one gets so sick of this eternal gaiety."

So at last she speaks, the sound of her own altered voice bringing her back with a start to bitterest consciousness. Alas, she can no more command it than she can command the hand that trembles upon his arm, the heart that palpitates to sickness within her breast. "But I am really feeling ill, M. Danton—if you would not mind very much the trouble of taking me to my carriage?"

"I am at your orders always, Mrs. Chamberlayne," answers Danton, with chill politeness. "If I did not sooner offer you my arm, you must remember that this pleasure has come upon me—unexpectedly, and that I looked upon Lord Stair as your escort. The last time it was my fate to conduct you through a crowd," he adds, "a very different

one to this—we were walking in the Champs Elysées. You have forgotten the occasion, no doubt?”

“I have forgotten nothing,” she answers, with sad humility. If the heart of a jilted man could ever be generous enough to pardon, surely that tone should evoke forgiveness! “There is just the sharpest edge of pain, I think, that all one’s strength, all one’s will, cannot help one to forget.

“Pain! My dear Mrs. Chamberlayne, you must really forgive me for my scepticism,” and Danton laughs, “but doctors are proverbially hard of belief. We see such endless, acute bodily sufferings in our profession that we grow callous about sentimental ones. What was the opera to-night? Only the ‘Barbieri.’ I should have thought you had been assisting, at least, at the breaking of Lucia’s heart, to have your imagination strung in such a minor key.”

"Do you recollect your telling me once that the hard work of London, 'the crowded rooms, late hours, stimulants, narcotics' that a life like this entails, would kill me?"

"I am afraid I must reply to that question in your own words. I have forgotten — have been able to forget—nothing. Whatever I may have said, it is evident that I had not the gift of true prophecy," he goes on, jestingly. "You are looking charmingly well, as all your crowds of friends, I am sure, must tell you. Well, and if you will let me say so, handsomer, a hundred times, if that be possible, than on the evening when I watched you drive away from Madame Bonchrétien's door in Paris."

"M. Danton, your prophecy was correct to the letter." Simply and slowly Leah speaks, thinking more of the substance of her words than of the effect they may produce upon her hearer. "The life of Lon-

don is killing me fast, and there is no one to stretch out a hand to save me. You talk of my crowds of friends? In this wide world there can be no woman, I should think, more absolutely friendless than I. This is being 'strung in a minor key,' you will say. Well, you can believe me or not, as you choose."

"Believe! and what reason have I to believe you?" he exclaimed. Very low, very self-contained is Danton's voice; not the nearest listener in the crowd could overhear him, and yet it vibrates with passion. "Eight months' additional practice can scarcely have lessened your proficiency—shall we call it your proficiency—in the art of smoothing down the sharp angles of unpalatable truths. Recollect, Mrs. Chamberlayne. The last time you and I talked together was in the atelier in the Rue Castiglione, two nights before your wedding. And we indulged in dark forebodings then," says Danton,

bitterly; "had melodramatic visions of self-sacrifice, hearts breaking sooner than be false, upon the very altar steps. Well, and when I saw you next, at the chapel in the Avenue Marbœuf, you looked as beautiful and, you must let me add, as little likely to die as you do at this moment."

"You are unjust ——"

"Say rather that I am most just, have got back the sober senses that played me false during the seven or eight days of last October. A man can scarcely go through what I have done during all the time since then, and reap no profit from his pain. You know what my experiences have been," he goes on, unheeding the white misery of her face; "my experience as a lad, my experience since I first met you. Do you think it likely that I, of all men living, will ever put faith again in the look, or word, or action, of a coquette?"

"This is plain speaking, indeed," she



utters, half-withdrawing her hand from his arm.

“It is speaking that you yourself have forced upon me,” Danton answers, almost roughly. “We shall do far better, believe me, to keep to pleasant insincerities, Mrs. Chamberlayne. Let us talk of delicious tenors, of your dress, your fan—never was a device more elegant. Your bouquet—allow me, as far as your carriage, to relieve you of its weight. Let us use the language of your world, the world into which it is your pleasure for ten minutes to introduce me, and I will do my best to be well-bred, polished, meaningless, as any fool of quality you reckon among your slaves. But let us leave pathetic regret, above all, let us leave remembrance, alone.”

Danton holds out his hand towards her flowers; the bouquet that was to have proved Lord Stair’s good omen; but ere he can touch them they lie soiled and broken in

the street, flung passionately away, as though their very contact were defilement, by Leah. (The driver of a hansom picks them up; as he wipes the mud from their white petals, thinks, perhaps, upon a pale girl's face at home to whom the sight of flowers like these may bring sunshine).

"You are right, M. Danton; I thank you for recalling me to reason. People who are sensible leave remembrances alone, and do not trouble themselves too much about the future. The present, this very night of June the thirtieth, is all that the wisest man living can call his own. Who knows where, or what we shall be, any of us, by the day after to-morrow?"

"The day after to-morrow," returns Danton, coldly, "will be Thursday. By a glance at my memorandum book, I could tell you, almost to a minute, how I shall pass it, the exact amount of grim, unpicturesque human misery that I shall be called

upon to witness. By turning to your tablets, surely you will find *your* engagements written likewise? The flower-show, polo-match, dinner, ball, destined to be graced by Mrs. Chamberlayne's presence."

"If ever you and I meet each other again, M. Danton, not like this, but spirit to spirit, conscience to conscience, I wonder, looking back, whether charity will be borne in upon you at last? You can feel compassion, I am sure, for your hospital patients, as you used to feel it for the poor in Paris. If any one wear silks and diamonds, have the misfortune to be a slave to balls and operas, you are pitiless."

"If I pitied—I must do more than pity," answers Danton, very low. As she speaks, something in her voice has recalled to him the moment in the atelier when he promised, whatever befell, to be her friend always. "As soon as I believe in suffering I must seek to cure it, and——"

"And my case is beyond the reach of physic," she interrupts him, hastily. "That is what you would say, is it not? You are right, quite right. My case is beyond the reach of physic!"

"The first essential for working a cure is, that the patient himself desire to be cured."

"And I—am satisfied with my state; find pleasure as you see, in operas and balls, in fans of elegant device, and silks and diamonds. M. Danton, here is my carriage. How can I apologize enough for all the trouble I have given you, the nonsense to which I have been obliging you to listen?"

She steps lightly into her brougham, commands her lips as they bid Danton good-bye; her hand as it rests, but no longer trembles, in his. And then, when he has walked away, she quietly gives the command, "Home," to her servants, and finds herself

driving through the soft purple of the summer midnight in the direction of Piccadilly.

. . . So the cup of her humiliation is drained to the last drop, the moral of her story spoken, and by Danton's lips. "Could he, of all men, put faith again in the word or look, or action, of a coquette?" The logical ending, the only one she had a right to look for, to the godless ceremony in the Avenue Marbœuf has come, or is at hand. And with it all, a lightened feeling is at Leah's heart. She has once more—and for the last time—spoken to Danton. She realizes the consequences of her action as clearly as though eyes were looking askance at her in the Park—her husband's loudly promised justice, Lord Stair's whispered threats, already carried into effect. And still her heart feels lighter, her lungs breathe in a purer atmosphere. For she *fears* no longer.

Money can buy so little; let all it can

buy, go, and by how much would she, Leah Chamberlayne, be the poorer? A stock of dresses, a dozen sets of jewels, the lip-service of a lady's maid, some score of the men and women called friends, and ready cash to enclose in filial letters to Prince Charming.

Love, and all belonging to love, are gone; then welcome the poverty which should have been love's price. Away from this feverish London, forgotten of the world,—show, glitter, reputation, forfeited, it may happen that once, ere she die, she shall taste peace. Such existence as she has known of late, at least, is over. The treadmill of heart-broken pleasure, the passionless, weary journey along the downhill road of evil, the never-silent reproaches of her own conscience—over.

Now just one more scene, one very commonplace part of the drama has to be acted. She must make her confession to her

husband. That Lord Stair will deliver her message, fulfil his errand of betrayal, she knows ; but there will be still much of which it behoves her to speak, and to-night. The starlit walk in the Champs Elysées, the meeting at the Café Chantant—every detail of her black infidelity (of the one hour in which she trod nearest to life's fair and honest possibilities) Jack shall learn. And if he kill her for it, if he kill her for her frankness, death can come but once ; and 'twere sweeter, perhaps, if one knew all, to die now, at twenty years old, for truth, than live for falsehood.

In her sorrows or her joys, Leah's mind can never get beyond the limits of immediate and personal emotion. Her imagination cannot deal with consequences that are complex and indirect. To look upon a crisis such as this through which she is passing, as a stepping-stone to higher things, a landmark of either mental or moral progress

were impossible to her. Love is slain; money and good repute have become as shadows; and death, if it choose to come, will she not fear.

. . . . Years teach us, with their oft repeated sorrows, that to live requires more heroism than to die. The courage of this girl of twenty is but the delirium of the poor wretch who smiles on earth and sky before taking the plunge from the dark arch into the darker river below; the blind desire to escape from present pain, no matter at what cost or by what outlet.

“And Madame has returned already?” So cries the smooth suspicious voice of the French lady’s-maid, when she sees her mistress’s face, midnight, as yet, scarce past. “Has anything dreadful happened — is Madame ill?”

No. Madame was never better; requires only to be left alone,—and Melanie may seek her pillow without delay. Madame



can unpin her diamonds, can lay aside her silks and laces for this once, without assistance. *For this once!*





## CHAPTER X.

### JACK SEES HIS DUTY.

**M**ISS MADGE HATHAWAY'S ball has reached its zenith. The ceremony of supper is over ; waltz, galop, and waltz, are succeeding each other with genuine after-supper celerity. A glimmer of pearly day-dawn through the half-closed venetians already shows the flaws on beauty's cheek, and yields to hard-worked waiters and long-suffering musicians the welcome assur-

ance that even the spirit of a Bohemian ball cannot be kept up for ever.

Among the hundreds of party-givers in and out of London society to-night, I should say that few have more cause for self-congratulation than Madge Hathaway. Her guests have enjoyed themselves with an unrestrained heartiness oftener met with, perhaps, in the outside artist world than in the great one. The champagne, supper, music, all have turned out irreproachably. Dionysius Robinson, that Ursa Major of theatrical critics, who *never* goes to any other balls in the profession but Madge's, has not only been present, but has failed to take offence at anything. And, lastly, late, 'tis true, but, however little one may have of his company, a Viscount is a Viscount always—Lord Stair has just put in an appearance. "On his way," so Madge explains afterwards to her friends, looking half an inch taller as she speaks,

“from a ball, with royalty present, at the Dowager Duchess of St. Ives.”

With all her sterling virtues, Miss Hathaway is not free from the one small British vice of title-loving. Rigid Hetty Robarts, presiding over her harlequin tea-service at a Bayswater kettledrum, could scarcely be gladder of a lord, fresh from the atmosphere of duchesses and princes, than is the frank-hearted, sham-detesting little actress, in her St. John's Wood ball-room.

Supper, as I have said, is over, as a ceremony, but supper, in its more intimate and convivial sense, has scarcely reached its height, when the announcement of Lord Stair's noble name causes an excitement among Madge's guests. The hostess herself is in the supper-room (the entire back premises of the house, canvassed in, boarded, and gas-lit for the occasion), with three or four devoted

attendants ministering to her needs. Of these, one holds her plate, a second her glass, a third the champagne bottle. To Jack Chamberlayne, as a special favour—perhaps because his unsteady hands best suit the office—Madge has entrusted her gloves and bouquet. Similar little groups of suns and satellites are to be seen on all sides, and on all sides are merry heart-whole laughter, and a conspicuous absence of those heavy and serious flirtations to be met with in entertainments of a different class. Not one of Madge's lady guests but is connected more or less directly with the stage; and they have come to Madge's ball, frankly, to dance, to drink champagne, to be amused! Pass your life in representing business love-scenes, at so many shillings, or pounds, a night—the same love-scene, if the public approve, for three hundred nights, it may be, at a stretch—and you will soon grow to disconnect the

employment with any idea of pastime. Young gentlemen, accustomed to furnish ball-room small-talk for Belgravian partners, not unfrequently have to attest the truth of this statement when they would pour the same honied utterances into the hardened and unbelieving ears of "the profession."

Lord Stair makes his way in, his crush hat under his arm, amidst the evergreens and silver paper flowers, that deck the entrance door to the supper-room; and Madge, with her real smile, and her imitation diamonds, runs forward to meet him. She does not like the man; her woman's instincts are too true for that; but, as I have been forced to confess for her, she dearly likes his title. And when you remember that Lydia Montmorenci is not six yards distant—poor Lydia Montmorenci, her very dearest friend, who has been making vain efforts to secure even a baronet for *her* ball next week,

you will not be disposed to judge Madge Hathaway's weakness too severely.

"So good of you, my lord! I was beginning to fear I should not have the honour. If I had been quite sure of your lordship's coming, I would have delayed the supper hour, but——"

"Supper is an indiscretion I never commit, myself," says Lord Stair, coolly taking his place at Madge's side, to the discomfiture of her other attendants, Jack Chamberlayne excepted. "If I am in time, however, to be Miss Hathaway's cup-bearer, I am more lucky than I deserve. Ah, Chamberlayne! you here? I thought the doctors had forbidden you to keep such late hours?"

"That is what I have been telling him, all along," cries kind-hearted Madge. "But poor Jack is as perverse as a baby. Now did I, or did I not, order you *not* to be here to-night, Mr. Chamberlayne? Answer truly."

"You sent me an invitation, and you told me to stay away," replies Jack, captiously. He is looking more haggard even than his wont—a very death's-head at Madge's feast. His cheeks are livid, save where one patch of fever stains them ; his eyes glassy and staring. "How the —— was I to know which was meant in sincerity?"

"Whenever a lady is concerned, you may be quite sure that what she advocates most, she desires least," says Lord Stair. "It is a rule, my dear boy, that you will hardly ever find to be wrong on application."

"Indeed ! I prefer my own experience on all subjects, you see, to that of other people."

Jack's tone is as near rudeness as possible. Though his first fierce jealousy of Lord Stair died long ago, his hatred for him, personally, remains vital as ever. And to-night Jack is curiously disposed to quarrel



with every one. Leah's last words, her face as she spoke to him of repentance "at the eleventh hour," linger unpleasantly in his recollection. If I were not afraid of using language altogether too grandiloquent for the occasion, I should well nigh feel inclined to say that Jack Chamberlayne's conscience pricks him.

"Right, perfectly right," returns Lord Stair, with his usual conciliating air of patronage. "No wisdom like that which we acquire practically, eh, Jack? And life, in these days, supplies a tolerably wide experience to most men, provided they possess the essential faculty of keeping their eyes open."

"Keeping their eyes open! What do you mean by that? I don't suppose you are alluding to me, Sir, are you?"

"I am alluding to all men; to myself, most of all," answers Lord Stair, pleasantly. "Whatever wisdom I may possess, and it

is not great, has come to me at first hand, generally"—and he turns with an air of gallantry to Madge, "from the cruel treatment I have received at the hands of your sex, Miss Hathaway."

It is long before Miss Hathaway finishes her supper. A Viscount supporting one's plate and filling one's champagne-glass is not, Madge feels, a sight to slur over before one's dearest friends. At last, however, her duties as hostess recall her to the ball-room, and then Jack Chamberlayne, who has been sitting fixedly watching the empty bottles on the supper-table, rises, and comes up abruptly to Lord Stair.

"You put my question off just now, so I deferred it until we were alone. What did you mean by your remark about a man keeping his eyes open? Because, if you meant it for me——"

"For you, my dear Chamberlayne," repeats Iago, soothingly. "You really disconcert

me. What right could I possibly have to give an opinion? Every fellow's affairs are his own—I—I——”

“You shall eat your words or make them plainer,” interrupts Jack in a hoarse undertone, his slight frame all a-quiver with agitation. “I know what you mean, perfectly well. Do you think I have not heard your cursed way of sneering down other women's reputation? You alluded—no, I will not mention names here. But you take me for a very different man to what I am, if you think I shall allow a cowardly innuendo of that kind to pass.”

A flush not good to see rises to Lord Stair's forehead; the fingers of his gloved right hand close upon each other with ominous tightness. Then the unwonted impulse dies; the second nature, which in him has become stronger than nature itself, gains the ascendancy.

“If I were not sure,” he remarks, with

calm indolence of tone, with the whole look and manner of a man too absolutely beyond the reach of an affront to feel the necessity of resenting it; "if I were not sure that you don't mean a syllable you say, Jack, I should take the liberty of calling you——"

"What, Sir? Pray go on."

"An exceedingly foolish boy, trying to pick a quarrel with a friend old enough to be his father. A quarrel—between *us*—for language that was never used, respecting a subject that never existed! Apropos of nothing, Jack"—Lord Stair comes a step nearer, and rests his hand upon the other's shoulder—"I believe, now I think of it, that I am charged with a message for you."

"A message!" repeats Jack, sullenly shifting his position, and only half reassured.

"From Mrs. Chamberlayne." The open-

ing bars of the cotillon, the final dance of Madge's ball, have by this time cleared the supper-room of its last loiterers; so Lord Stair commits no indiscretion in mentioning Leah's name. "When I took leave of her outside the opera house at midnight, I promised to send you home early if I found you here. But I am afraid, at this hour in the morning, the word 'early' has not quite the significance an anxious wife would desire."

Lord Stair's expression of face is genial; his manner—smooth, unconcerned, cautious—supplies no interpretation whatsoever to his speech. Yet, in a second, Jack's passion-sharpened faculties grasp the meaning it was intended they should grasp.

"Outside the opera—at midnight—I don't know what you are driving at. Mrs. Chamberlayne was on her way to the Duchess of St. Ives' ball. Do you mean to tell me you did not meet her there?"

"Well, no." Softly, deliberately, Lord Stair speaks, feeling no more pity for his hearer, than vacillation as to his own scheme of vengeance. "I had had the pleasure of being in Mrs. Chamberlayne's box during the last act—charmingly Patti sang for us in 'Rosina,' but this new tenor is a delusion; all new tenors are delusions. Mrs. Chamberlayne quitted the theatre on my arm, and——"

"And from the opera went on to Fitz Osborne House. What's the good of making a long story out of nothing?"

Lord Stair pauses for a minute. He looks at Jack Chamberlayne hard.

"Mrs. Chamberlayne's *intention* was to have proceeded to Fitz Osborne House, I know, but while I was searching for her carriage, she was seized with sudden faintness, and, I imagine, returned home. Oh, my dear fellow, you need not alarm yourself." For Jack's face has turned bloodless.

"Mrs. Chamberlayne's indisposition was, I am persuaded, of a most transitory nature, and I had the satisfaction of leaving her in excellent professional care——"

"Professional!"

"Our old Paris friend, M. Danton—you know, of course, that he is in London?—by a lucky accident was passing along before the opera house at that moment. I left Mrs. Chamberlayne on his arm."

Long ago in this story I remarked there were some few honest points in Jack Chamberlayne's character, beyond the lights of a Bell Baltimore to discover. There is courage in him, also, and manhood, beyond anything Lord Stair looked for. No well-balanced casuistries, no enlightenments from modern thought, perplex poor Jack. Of the philosophy which makes our nervous system the supreme arbiter, our notions of good and evil dependent on certain inherited conditions of our bodily organization, he

never heard. In his old-fashioned, inconsistent, stumbling way, he has his own conception of *right*, and acts up to it. And so, even before Lord Stair ceased speaking,

“He had seen his duty, a dead sure thing,  
And went in for it, there and then.”

Leah has disobeyed him; short and sharp shall be the reckoning between them; but that is for the future. Not before Lord Stair, the self-elected detective who has chosen to betray her, will he utter a word, show a trace of feeling, that may do her wrong. He is her protector still—her protector, at least, until she has had the chance of self-defence. Not through weakness of his shall a shadow of suspicion rest upon her good name.

“M. Danton? — I had almost forgotten his existence. A fellow who lived in your Paris boarding-house, played on the piano,



and that sort of thing, wasn't he? A very good sort of fellow, if I recollect right, and a favourite of Mrs. Chamberlayne's. As you say, you could not have left her under better care."

Thus, with death at his heart, does Jack Chamberlayne force his tongue to speak.

Lord Stair looks straight at him for a moment or two in silence. "And so you are not going to quarrel with me this time, Jack?" he exclaims, with a laugh. "And quite right too! There is not a man or woman living—a woman especially—worth the trouble of quarrelling about. Good night, old fellow. I don't know what you Benedicts may say, but for sober old bachelors like me it is time to be thinking of home."

After this fashion they part. If, unsuspected by himself, some rudimentary kind of conscience should exist within Lord Stair,

it is possible that Jack Chamberlayne's face may haunt him in the dark days of gout and rheumatism yet to come.





## CHAPTER XI.

### AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

FOR the face wears a look that in our smooth, artificial, nineteenth-century lives we are seldom called upon to behold—the impotent despair of weakness, that shall soon become unreason. May you, reader, be spared from ever witnessing the like.

Away out of the house of feasting, away from the cruel din of violins, of moving feet, of merry voices. . . . So Jack Cham-

berlayne, scarce conscious of his actions, makes his last exit from the debateable land called Bohemia. Morning is softly breaking as he quits Miss Hathaway's villa; by the time he reaches Piccadilly the rose-flush of sunrise already lies on tree and house-roof: the first fair day of a new July, gladdest month of the twelve to simple workers among fields and hedge-rows, has been given to the world.

Mr. Chamberlayne fits his latch-key, this time with no trembling hand, into the lock; unfastens the door of the hotel, and walks quickly, as if his old school-boy strength had come back to him, up the stairs.

As he reaches the first landing the door of his wife's dressing-room opens, and a white figure appears there. Worn, heavy-eyed, and still with a tranquil expression round her lips, Leah advances a step or two to meet her husband.

"You are late, Jack — early, rather — I have just been watching the sun rise," she whispers. "When one cannot sleep it seems so good to see the day come."

He pushes her roughly aside, for she has attempted to rest her hand upon his arm, enters the dressing-room, locks the door; then crosses over to one of the windows, draws back the curtain, and stands watching her; all this in silence, more fraught with meaning to Leah than any speech to which she has listened in her life.

At last — "Come here," he exclaims, curtly; his voice makes her shudder. She is accustomed to hear it loud, harsh, passionate, not concentrated, self-collected, as it is now. "Oh, a little closer, please." For Leah has drawn back from him; she leans wearily resting her arms upon the back of an arm-chair. "You are strong enough, surely, to stand unsupported, and look me in the face for the space of about three minutes?"

What we have got to say to each other will scarcely take longer. I have seen Lord Stair, Mrs. Chamberlayne."

"Lord Stair told me that he intended to see you. At Miss Madge Hathaway's."

"Lord Stair quitted you last outside the Opera House. At what hour did you return to this hotel?"

"I should imagine at five or ten minutes past twelve. It does not take long to drive from Covent Garden to Piccadilly."

"It would be too much to ask, perhaps, why you went through the form of returning here at all?"

"Jack!"

"We have had the whole question out before, remember. I told you that on the day you renewed, or rather on the day I discovered you had renewed, a certain

intimacy, we should wish each other good-bye. It is impossible for you to have forgotten this."

"I have renewed no intimacy. I met M. Danton, by accident, as I was leaving the opera, and I had turned faint. You know how little strength I had for it all when I started, when I asked you to come with me to-night. And I was glad, too, if you force me to tell the truth, to be rid of Lord Stair."

"The truth—spoken from you to me! Well, Leah, I believe you for once. Lord Stair has lived his day. You are ambitious; you told me that, I remember, in Paris, and you intended from the first, that Lord Stair should help us on in the world you affect, be our stepping-stone to dukes, duchesses, and the like. He has done it. Now let us be rid of him. In any confession you choose to make of your own heartlessness or ingratitude, I believe you."

•

“My heartlessness!” she repeats. “My ingratitude towards Lord Stair——”

“Your ingratitude, black as night to me,” thunders Jack, his coolness forsaking him. “I was no saint, I know; I pretended to nothing of the kind when I married, but I did begin by loving you, and would have made you happy, if you had had a heart of flesh, not stone. Look at the way I have saved your whole family, by ——! Look what your father owes me already; and scarce a week but I get one of his plausible begging letters still. ‘For the sake of his beloved Leah—the sweet and innocent tie that binds us together!’ Ah, Colonel Pascal will find the difference. I consider myself bound to the impostor no longer by——”

“Stop!” exclaims Leah, the dark glow of passion in her eyes. “Before you insult me, or which is worse, my father, to my face, hear what I have to say. Do you think I



have watched alone during the hours of this night; do you think I have watched the sun rise on another day, without forming some plans for leaving the hateful slavery of my life?"

"I have no doubt of it whatever. It would be too much, I suppose, to ask whose superior wisdom has guided you in your resolutions?"

"If you mean M. Danton," she replies, her manner altering in an instant, "you are as blindly, grossly wrong as you have always been in your suspicions. I met M. Danton by accident, as I might have met any other acquaintance of old days. He walked with me to my carriage, was with me, altogether, about ten minutes, or less. In all human probability, I should say that M. Danton . . . and myself . . . will never speak to each other again while we live."

"You seem rather unduly agitated under such circumstances," remarks Jack, upon

whom not a change in her voice or face is thrown away. "The recollection of a casual meeting, of an acquaintance to whom you will probably never speak again while you live, need scarcely, I should have thought, cause your lips to tremble, your breath to come short, your cheeks—but enough of all this!" he exclaims, with an accent of irrepressible disgust. "Act with me, be false with me no longer. Your game is played out to the very last card, as far as I am concerned. The rest," Jack says this with a laugh that might make your heart ache, "is for the lawyers. There shall be no scandal, you know. I wish to do my duty, to cast less slur upon you than you merit. There shall be nothing to hinder *you* from going to balls and dinner-parties still. Incompatibility of disposition; Mr. Chamberlayne's vile temper; any excuse you or your family prefer can be given to the world. But I will keep to the letter of what

I threatened. We will live together no longer."

"Because I have disobeyed you, accidentally? I don't seek to change your resolution, Jack; I ask you simply to reflect upon what you are saying. Because M. Danton, not Lord Stair, walked with me from the door of the opera to my carriage."

"Because you have deceived me from the hour you became my wife and before, and others know it as well as I. Would you make me believe that Lord Stair—curse him, I say, with his smiling, sneering innuendos! would you have me think Lord Stair knew nothing of your actions in the Rue Castiglione? Speak out, and if you care for yourself, keep as near to facts as your tongue can come. Did Lord Stair know of the attachment, the romance—I will use pretty words for ugly subjects—that existed between you and Danton in the days before you married me?"

He advances a step or two nearer, his face, his gestures, at every minute becoming more dangerous. But Leah neither blanches nor shrinks away. Leah, who for weeks past has moved, and slept, and dreamed under the cold foreshadowing of this scene, now that the scene is verily being enacted goes through her part in it with nerves of steel.

“You ask me the question curiously àpropos, Jack.” Thus, soft and unmoved, comes her answer. “Before you returned home I had made up my mind to tell you all that there is to be told on this very subject. If you recollect, I wished to make confession to you once before ; it was on the night when the Robartses had dined with us. I told you then that if you knew the whole truth, instead of half, as regarded the past, it might be better. I was weak enough to hope we might have made a fresh start—yes, you and I, Jack, and have grown to be more to

each other than we had ever been before. And then you were harsh, or I turned coward—perhaps it was only that—I turned coward, and the good moment passed. Jack, just at first when we were married I used to try my best, do you know, to make things go smooth!”

“With tears, and silence, and moping. ‘Will you drive to-day?’ ‘If driving gives you pleasure, dear Jack.’ ‘Will you have a boat for the afternoon?’ ‘If you care about boating, dear Jack.’ I remember the cheerful kind of spirit in which your endeavours were made.”

“Until that morning in Rome, when you read Deb’s letter, and everything in our lives turned to bitterness. I don’t go back to this to shield myself, for indeed I am afraid of nothing now, your anger or another’s. The heart within me is dead,” says Leah, “and hope and fear are dead, too. Only—well, I suppose none of us sink. quite

so low as to wish to seem worse to others than we are. And so I would like you to believe that at first I did try to do the duty that lay before me. I would like you to believe, also, that I have never passed one day since my marriage—no, have never woke on one morning, without realizing the greatness of the wrong committed in becoming your wife.”

Jack stares at her blankly.

“Cut the introduction shorter,” he exclaims. “I have no taste, as you know, for tall talk. You are only wasting time in words.”

“And as to my conduct earlier, nothing can excuse me, I know, and yet, sometimes, when I remember how I had been brought up, and how generously you had acted about money to my father, and how near our wedding-day had come before—No, no,” she interrupts herself, bitterly, “there was no excuse for me—not the shadow of one!

And you are right. I am only wasting time on words. Jack, what I have got to tell you—what I ought to have told you long ago, is this. One Sunday evening, October the 15th it must have been, little Deb was sick. I had been sitting at her side all day, and papa and Naomi were away, and, without intending any evil, I walked out in the Tuileries Gardens and as far as the Champs Elysées with M. Danton. I was away out of Madame Bonchrétien's house altogether two hours——”

“Alone! You and Danton alone! Get on with the story quick,” says Jack Chamberlayne hoarsely. “Let me know with as little delay as possible, the measure of your disgrace.”

“Disgrace!” exclaims Leah, lifting up her face, and looking, straight and undaunted into her husband's eyes. “No; of *that* I have nothing to tell. If disgrace exists, it is in your own thoughts, not in any action of

mine. I committed an imprudence, if you will — a breach, rather, of conventional decorum, in starting for that walk with M. Danton unchaperoned. But imprudence, it seems to me, belongs far oftener to virtue than to crime! Oh, I have seen the world, remember, Jack! I went to dozens of Scarborough balls and picnics in the days when I first met you. I know what the life is that we lead, all of us here in London, and I say that, at such a pass as you and I have come to, we should look at the substance of things, not their varnish. My walk with M. Danton was an imprudence, a folly, if you will. My guilt came afterwards. My disgrace was in being false to the dictates of my own heart, and what might have been an honest, life-long——”

“In marrying me, in short! Well, at least, this is a new system of morals. The lover, the Italian vagabond, with his songs and his piano-strumming, is a ‘folly, an im-



prudence.' The unfortunate husband, for the sake of whose British gold romance must go to the wall, is 'disgrace.' I am afraid you will find that philosophy won't wear. You will not be able to impose it on the world. For the world shall know this!" cries Jack, lashing himself with every word he utters into added fury. "I did mean to have acted generously towards you, to have taken the blame of our separation upon myself, and have screened you from the result of your own falsehood! But I will do the thing that is *right*. Though every finger in London point at me, I'll hide nothing. The world shall know what sort of woman I married and separated from in the hour when I discovered the truth!"

"You need take no trouble on that score." Unflinchingly Leah speaks, though she gauges the nature of her peril well; reads aright the pent-up fury that trembles in every muscle of Jack Chamberlayne's frame.

"Lord Stair, I am sure, will need no coadjutor in publishing the details of our unhappiness."

"You—you mean——"

"That Lord Stair met me on the Sunday evening I spoke of, and recognised me. For a long while," she goes on, with a kind of desperate calmness, "I was uncertain about this, and was coward enough to tremble at the mere possibility of such a man as Lord Stair turning traitor. That was when he was my friend. We understand each other now. To-night has made Lord Stair my deadliest enemy for ever, and my secret, such as it is, belongs to him—oh, and my good name with it, if it pleases you to say so! And I care nothing. Men are cruel, this world is cruel. I want only to die. My confession to you is made. Deal with me now and hereafter as you choose."

There is silence for some few seconds.

when Leah has ceased speaking; the last ominous silence that comes before the outburst of a storm.

“And you think all that tirade will move me,” thunders Jack Chamberlayne at last. “As if I did not know *who* put the lesson into your lips, just as he first put infidelity to me into your heart! But I will be even with the scoundrel yet. For reasons of your own, you have quarrelled with our friend, Lord Stair, to-day, you tell me. Well, and for reasons of my own, I will quarrel with our other friend, M. Danton, to-morrow. What is his address here in London?”

“M. Danton’s address?—ah, for mercy’s sake, don’t look at me like that. I never heard his address. I know no more than I have told you. Most likely I shall never see or hear of M. Danton after to-night. I——”

“Will you give me his address this instant, or will you not?”

"I never heard it. I believe Lord Stair mentioned that M. Danton was out-surgeon at one of the hospitals——"

"His address, I say, unless you want to die as you have lived, a falsehood on your tongue! Oh, there is no escape, Mrs. Chamberlayne," for she has made an instinctive movement towards the door. "You shall not leave this room, you shall not stir a yard, until—until——"

But the sentence remains for ever unfinished. As he advances towards her, a hand cruelly uplifted, the wild light of frenzy on his face, Jack Chamberlayne stops, reels heavily for support against the wall. A moment later, and he has sunk—a dark stream issuing from his suddenly-silenced lips—into Leah's outstretched arms.



## CHAPTER XII.

### POOR HUMAN NATURE.

“**A**ND in another three months he would have inherited.”

So says the sympathetic world, when intelligence gets noised abroad of how spendthrift, worthless Jack Chamberlayne lies sick unto death. In another three months three hundred thousand pounds might have become the lovely Mrs. Chamberlayne's portion. (Not that she is lovely, either ; no

regularity of profile, a mere fashion of the moment!) Now, as matters actually stand, who are the legal heirs? A Mr. and Mrs. Robarts, who live in Bayswater. An exceedingly pretty little woman; sea-green Mrs. Hetty, for the first time in her life, dubbed with brevet-rank of beauty! And Mr. Robarts? Oh, a rising barrister of undoubted talent. Somewhat taciturn, like all your really clever fellows, but a young man certain to make his mark on his age. Let us hasten to leave our cards to offer our best condolences to Mr. and Mrs. Robarts.

“In another three months he would have inherited.” It is the first miserable reflection of Colonel Pascal when he gets the telegraphic news of his son-in-law’s seizure. It is the first thought of Bell Baltimore, compelled to forfeit a river picnic for the afternoon, and uncertain, even in her latitudinarian world, whether it will be altogether

decent to go out any more during the remainder of the season. And Lord Stair, brought to a sudden stop in his projects of enmity or of friendship! Is *his* first impulse one of remorse—pity? Lord Stair's first impulse is to act. Presuming on his position as the friend of the house, Lord Stair takes care that the ablest physicians in London shall stand beside Jack's pillow, superintends personally the laying down of bark before the hotel, delivers bulletins to enquirers; acquitting himself of these duties with a quiet promptness, a mingled delicacy, and tact beyond praise, and at the end of forty-eight hours has his reward. While better men by hundreds of thousands have been wishing this world good-bye, spendthrift, worthless Jack Chamberlayne has lived—with enormous care and quiet, say the physicians, may, under Providence, yet rally.

Hetty Robarts receives these tidings from

Lord Stair's lips at the door of the hotel, and with such mingled feelings as they are calculated to inspire, drives back, the blinds of "our brougham" decently lowered, to Bayswater. Under Providence, the Jewish wife, raised from no one knows what fifth-rate position, may inherit the hundred thousand pounds, and the little army in perambulators be beggars.

"And Mrs. Chamberlayne's devotion to her husband is something beautiful!" Thus says Hetty, with genuine tears in her eyes, to Mr. Robarts. "Lord Stair declares it to be so! Not for a single instant does she leave the sick room. No hand but hers must give your cousin his medicine or his drink. I desire to detract from no one's virtues, Charles, particularly in a case where there are so very few to spare. But I do wish, from the bottom of my heart, that I could believe the motives of Leah Chamberlayne to be disinterested. It would do me good to think



that it was your poor dear cousin, and not the hundred thousand pounds, over which she trembles."

"The result will be about the same, whatever the motives," says Mr. Robarts, drily. "As to the hundred thousand pounds, let Jack once attain his majority, and I would put the wife's prospect of inheriting pretty much in the same balance with my own or Mrs. Baltimore's. Of the three, I am not sure but that Mrs. Baltimore's would be the better chance."

But in this Mr. Robarts, lawyer though he be, is mistaken. As Jack slowly turns his face again towards life, is allowed to write a shaky sentence on a slate, or whisper for half a minute at a time in his wife's ear, as inch by inch the poor fellow gradually wears round, so far, at least, as to be pronounced out of immediate danger, the first approach to a wish that he expresses is—that Bell Baltimore be kept away from him!


Once, when he lay in the land of shadows, too weak to rebel, Bell, by bold strategy, did effect an entrance into the sick room, her trained silks rustling against chairs and tables, her face ornamented with a becoming tinge of rouge and sympathy, a bouquet of powerfully-smelling hot-house flowers in her hand, "for the dear invalid."

That visit was her first and last.

"Throw the flowers through the window, and forbid the woman the door." Such were the dear invalid's orders, issued, despite his feeble condition, with unmistakeable will and animus. He will not see Bell Baltimore, shudders at the name of Lord Stair, declares himself *grateful*, a sarcastic smile flickering across his thin face, for Hetty's unremitting inquiries, but begs that for the future she will save herself the trouble of her daily drive to Piccadilly. If any important change come for the worst, let Mrs. Robarts be

assured that a messenger shall be despatched to Bayswater without delay !

All he wants, and has, is his wife. As faithfully as though ignoble suspicion had never arisen, or cruel words divided them, Leah watched Jack Chamberlayne during those first awful hours when the physicians, even, scarce knew which breath might prove his last. As tenderly as though they were bride and bridegroom in the first flush of their married love, she tends him during the slow and lagging days of his comparative convalescence. And her touch, her voice, the very sense of her presence, are as medicine to him. Heaven, sparing to her in some moral gifts, has undoubtedly bestowed upon Leah that most excellent thing in woman, a genius for nursing. Her dress does not rustle, her step does not sound; she divines the patient's wants by instinct, she ministers to them with hands of down. And then, just as in the old days of Deb's



headaches, Leah never wearies, or never lets the sick eyes that watch her so jealously discern her weariness.

“You have cheated Hetty Robarts beautifully, my dear,” Jack remarks to her one afternoon. In the silent monotony of the sick chamber, days have drifted on into weeks. An August sun is blazing on the deserted pavements of Piccadilly. “But for you I must assuredly have been physicked out of this world. Three doctors at once! Easy to fathom my lord’s motives when he sent all those gadflies buzzing round me! Well, you will have your recompense, Leah, in your own heart and otherwise. Only let me hold on till my birthday, and you shall see the splendid provision I mean to make for you——”

“Forgive me everything that is past, Jack,” she answers, bending over him. “Forgive me all the pain I have caused you since our marriage, and I ask for no other

reward. It grieves me to hear you speak of money still."

Her voice falters ; a tear, genuine as ever woman shed, falls on the wasted hand she lifts between her own. But the invalid looks at her sharply. With the return of comparative strength, Jack Chamberlayne has become Jack Chamberlayne again. When he was confined to his bed, dependent on Leah almost for the breath he drew, he thought of *her*, her patience, and her sweetness, only. As soon as he could be moved to his sofa, could walk, leaning on her arm, about the room, look through his window at the moving world without, he began to remember ; and to remember for poor Jack, is—to suspect.

"You are a good girl, Leah. Not one wife in a thousand would nurse a fellow as you have nursed me, and I am quite sure you mean what you say—for the moment. But you are young, you see—not twenty-

one yet. Why, you will have a whole life before you after I am done for and put out of sight! And a hundred thousand pounds is a good big sum—'tis all nonsense to talk of the subject of money grieving you. Money must be talked, and must be thought about. Well, well," he goes on presently, "we have cheated Hetty Robarts, at all events! When I lay so ill, Leah—lay, not able to move or speak—it used to choke me every time I heard them whisper her name. 'Mrs. Robarts's kindest inquiries.' 'Is there no way in which Mrs. Robarts can be of service?' And now we have disappointed her. As I mean to disappoint all other mercenary designers—you hear me, you understand my meaning clearly—if I only get along as far as October."

He continues in the same mood throughout the day; for ever harping on his expected money, and on those he will disinherit and enrich, if he have but strength enough

to tide over the weeks that yet divide him from his twenty-fifth birth-day. Towards evening a fresh idea seems to take possession of his mind. Dr. Wentworth is doing nothing for him! (Until now, Jack's confidence in his physician has been unbounded; sooner than risk change of treatment, he has insisted upon remaining in town throughout the burning summer heats). Cod liver oil, phosphites, malt: as if there were no newer medicines than these! But your London specialists are all the same—never will make a step out of the beaten path of routine. Now if he could only get the opinion of an honest general practitioner; of—a man like Danton, say? This, with a searching glance at his wife's face. There was some kind of unpleasantness between them, no doubt, in days gone by. There may have been injustice, even, for which Jack, as far as in him lies, is ready to make amends. A poor broken-down sinner like himself ought not to cherish rancour

against anyone. But as to Danton's abilities—"If any fellow in Europe can pull me round," says Jack, "make me hang out another six weeks—'tis only five weeks and three days to my birthday—it is he ! Why, his old friendship for you, my love, if nothing else, must give him a special interest in my case."

Leah is resting for awhile beside an open window, breathing such freshened evening air as Piccadilly in August affords, and with a reflected sunset glow lighting up the pallor of her tired face. Not a change of expression can Jack detect there, at the abrupt mention of Danton's name. She hears him patiently out ; then rises, and comes over to his side, ready to execute whatever orders, reasonable or unreasonable, he may see fit to issue.

"If you are dissatisfied with Dr. Wentworth, Jack, you do well, certainly, to have another opinion. For myself——"

"You do not think that Danton would



have insight—special insight—into my case, beyond all other doctors? Well, I do ; and what is more, I mean to call him in without an hour's delay. You will oblige me with some writing materials."

He covers three sides of a sheet of paper with his weak, scrawling handwriting, folds his note, puts it into an envelope, which he directs. "The fact is, I have been wishing to see Danton for some days past," he explains, leaning back, wan and exhausted after even this small bit of work. "And as I had reason to know, my dear, that you were unacquainted with his address, I commissioned Wentworth to find it out for me. Now, the question is, will Danton come or not?"

"I should say—not!" remarks Leah, the blood for the first time rising to her cheek. "M. Danton's path and ours lie apart, Jack. He has his own work, his own ideas of duty——"

"And those very ideas will bring him to Piccadilly," interrupts Jack, with cynical emphasis. "Danton has a good heart. You yourself have told me so. He will never reject the proffered olive-branch from a wretch in my condition."

And the assertion comes true, like many another cynically uttered prediction. Towards the sorrows of a life of fashion and pleasure, the repentance, capricious or sincere, of a tired votary of the world—towards these, as Leah has proved, Danton is pitiless. He *has* too good a heart to disobey the summons of poor, dying Jack Chamberlayne. The note is sent off at once by special messenger. Shortly after noon, on the following day, a card bearing the name of Eugene Danton is brought up by one of the servants of the hotel, and placed in Leah's hands. "The visitor inquired for Mr., not Mrs. Chamberlayne; and as Mr. Chamberlayne does not receive——"

"Admit the gentleman directly," cries Jack, rising feebly from his sofa. "What the —— do you mean by keeping my medical attendants waiting? You will remain with us, of course, my love," he goes on, addressing his wife, as the servant leaves the room; for Leah has started up nervously, is turning in the direction of her own apartment. "Surely it will give you pleasure to witness the reconciliation of friends?"

"I will wait, if you desire it," is Leah's answer. "Only . . . as the visit is professional, I thought——"

"The visit is a vast deal more than professional," says Jack. "I consult M. Danton, not as a mere physician, but a friend, a counsellor deeply interested in the settlement of my worldly concerns. . . . Ah, here he is!" With an effort he advances a faltering step or two as Danton is ushered in. "Monsieur Danton, this is really good of you. Mrs. Chamberlayne was a little doubtful

how you would receive my note ; but I am glad to see you appreciated *its spirit*. You find me frightfully pulled down, Monsieur, a mere wreck of what I was, and I was never a Hercules ! Well, well—much has happened since I saw you last in Paris—much has happened !”

Jack extends a clammy, trembling hand to Danton, then sinks down again upon his couch, motioning to the other to take a place beside him. “Mrs. Chamberlayne, my love, you have not bidden M. Danton welcome,” he remarks to Leah, who until now has stood aloof, a cold spectator of the meeting. “Mrs. Chamberlayne has been my devoted nurse ever since my first seizure, Danton. You must not think her pale cheeks arise from bodily illness. Nothing but devotion to her duties, I assure you, has lessened Mrs. Chamberlayne’s bloom.”

*Bloom !* Leah’s one characteristic beauty

—the complexion, with its delicate snows, its evanescent tinges of vermeil, too bright for health—is gone for ever. Her skin has become sickly—livid as the petals of a flower shut away from air and sun. The faint, bluish tinge, which to a practised eye reveals so much, is round her lips. A change, subtler than time or illness could effect, has stolen all the youthful roundness of her features. In a second, Danton's memory carries him back to the night when he first saw Jack Chamberlayne and his betrothed threading the mazes of that ghastly Dance of Death at Madame Bonchrétien's. The lover rouged and travestied, his haggard cheeks flaming under their mask of paint, his eyes glassy and solemn. The bride, resting on the arm of Lord Stair, breathless after her waltz, and with the foreshadowing of what he who runs may now see accomplished upon her face. With cruel accuracy has his diagnosis of that night been verified ; overtrue

were his fears for the physical outlook of the fated lovers — Colonel Pascal's April daisies—who were to be bone of one bone, flesh of one flesh, bound together, for happiness or for misery, like living nerves in the same body, till death them should part. Yes, nature and destiny have proved honest. The wear and tear of fast London life, the sleepless nights and hard-worked days of a career of folly, have done their office but too surely !

“ All I complain of is—that you did not sooner bid me come.” Seriously Danton says this, and kindly : his voice, to Leah's heart, seems speaking from the other side of the grave. “ In Wentworth's hands you need no further professional advice, but as a friend, Mr. Chamberlayne, you should have thought earlier of sending for me.”

He addresses the husband ; but in spite of himself, Danton's glances seek the wife's face ; the white face, beautiful in its wreck

of beauty, that once was to have been his world.

Jack's jealous eyes watch him searchingly.

"Yes, to be sure, as a friend; that is precisely what I have been saying to Mrs. Chamberlayne; you would advise me as a friend, feel a real human interest in helping to keep my life together a few weeks more, at all events. You know how much depends upon my lasting till October, Danton? The possession of a hundred thousand pounds (minus these West End Shylock's loans at sixty per cent.), or my leaving my poor wife there without a shilling!"

"October! You must not talk about October," returns Danton, cheerfully. "We must send you to Mentone or Madeira for next winter, and——"

"If my father had been a wise man it would have been all over before now,"

interrupts Jack, shortly. "If I had been allowed to come of age, like other fellows at twenty-one, the money would have been spent long ago, and *all the complications* of this last year would have been avoided. You understand?"

Danton bows gravely.

"But Mr. John Chamberlayne, senior, a well-meaning man, and sensible, as long as he kept to trade details, thought that by making the ridiculous will he did, holding me in leading strings till I was twenty-five, he would save me, the hundred thousand pounds rather, from the hands of the tribes. You see with what result. Now, Danton, in cases like mine, the less beating about the bush that goes on the better. You have your stethoscope with you? Then let us hear how much lungs *you* say I have left, without delay. Leah, my love, you will have the kindness to leave M. Danton and myself for a few minutes alone."



He is in as hopeless a state as a man can be to live at all; no stethoscope is wanted to tell Danton that. Will the parched lips continue to breathe, the weak heart to pulsate over another six weeks, or be at rest to-night? Not all the science in Europe could answer that question with certainty.

"Don't have any qualms about telling me the truth, Danton." Physician and patient are alone together now; the examination is finished. "My birthday is on October the second, and this is the third week in August. Have I a chance of inheriting or have I not?"

After a minute's hesitation: "My poor friend," replies Danton, gently, but with firmness, "the people of my country have this proverb, 'Our last robe is made without pockets.' *L'ultimo vestito ce lo fanno senza tasche.* When a man finds himself . . . in that narrow path that we must all alike tread, questions of money should vex him

no longer. Worry yourself less about your hundred thousand pounds and your chances of life will be greater."

A dark look comes over Jack Chamberlayne's sunken face.

"Easy for you to be so philosophical. Easy for you with half a century of strength and health before you, to make light of money! But for me, not five-and-twenty years old, to be cut off like this,—see the inheritance that should have been mine pass to others, before my very eyes. Can you do nothing for me? Is there no hope? no medicine that will give me strength for five short weeks?—I ask no more. At least, you won't refuse to come and see me to the last? You will try your utmost for me?"

And with those miserable blue eyes fixed on him in their wistful intensity, how can Danton refuse? His time is overfilled already, he urges, his hospital

duties are onerous, he is not in general practice, lives far away from Piccadilly; but all his objections are unavailing. Doctor Wentworth is going with his family to the seaside for several weeks, and Jack declares that he will see no other physician in his absence. Unless Danton consent to attend him—oh, unprofessionally, of course unprofessionally!—he will be left to die like a dog. As to making it worth his while——

“We need not talk about that,” says Jack, looking with sharp meaning at Danton’s face. “You are not the kind of fellow, I know, to care for fees. Pull me through till October the second, and your conscience will square off all accounts. Have the people in your country no proverb to tell how a good man’s conscience is his own exceeding great reward?”

“And now I feel easier in my mind as

regards my worldly affairs, than I have done for weeks," he remarks to Leah, when they are once more alone. "Danton has got a brain in his head, knows his trade well, and means to do his best by me. If any man in London can prolong my life, he will. You see I possess an acuter knowledge of human nature than you gave me credit for, Leah. M. Danton has too good a heart to forsake an old friend in extremis! With his science and your nursing, my love, I may yet live long enough to do the thing that is right."





## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE LAST IRONY OF FATE.

THE world has left London long ago, saving of course one unimportant section, the couple of million working men and women who never leave it. Yet it happens that none of the persons intimately concerned in the last scene of Jack Chamberlayne's life have put a very long distance between themselves and Piccadilly. Lord Stair procures his daily food on board a

friend's yacht at Cowes. Bell Baltimore, more bored by Autumn than by Spring, by nature than by art, flies restlessly from watering-place to watering-place. Hetty Robarts, with her attendant perambulators, babies, nursemaids, and husband, has not the heart, "in our poor young relative's deplorable state," for anything livelier than Herne Bay.

It comes, therefore, to pass, that all events transpiring in Jack Chamberlayne's dying chamber—for alas! not the most euphemistic of court doctors could now call that chamber by any other name—are as well known among inquiring and interested friends, as though the season were still at its prime. And more than one warning does Jack receive, anonymous and otherwise, as to his temerity in choosing so unorthodox a physician as M. Danton for his attendant. Anonymous is not a word one cares to have to write; but a faithful chronicler must set

down facts, without extenuation. And I fear, with a hundred thousand pounds at stake, many honourably minded people would hold an anonymous letter justifiable, if it could protect the last moments of a suffering and intestate fellow-creature from the mercenary designs—of others!

Jack communicates each fresh note of warning as he gets it to his wife, laughing in his own wisdom at his advisers, and the object of their suspicions alike. Fools who would pretend to understand his business better than himself! As if he could not, unhelped, discover whys and wherefores in plenty for M. Danton's brotherly kindness! As if anonymous letters were needed to show that so much patience, strength, gentleness, must have their centre and their source in self! Ah, one may be thought incapable for five-and-twenty years, yet prove keen-witted in the end—keen-witted enough to outreach the knaves who have

traded on one's folly, and still act righteously and to the approval of conscience in all things.

As time wears on, the weeks, at last, lessening to days that stand between him and his inheritance, Jack seems to long with a kind of morbid anxiety for his unorthodox physician's presence. It chances, just at this season of the year, that Danton is entitled to brief leave of absence from the hospital to which he belongs. He spends his hardly-earned holiday by remaining in town, and becoming not only Jack Chamberlayne's doctor, but his nurse. The invalid, capricious, it may be, through extremity of weakness, cares less for his wife's ministrations than formerly. It is Danton now, who must give him his medicine, help him from his bed to his couch, read to him, as you would to a child, a few simple lines at a time—cheer him! Leah, to whose tired heart the situation



appears the last supreme irony of fate, looking on, passive.

What can be the true mainspring of Danton's conduct? In the sultry Autumn hours, during the long thought-searching watches of the night, impossible that this question should not force itself upon her mind. As regards Jack's opinions, sincere even in their cynicism, there is no room for doubt. The look, the tone, with which he alludes to Danton in her presence, "A wide-awake fellow that—the one doctor in Europe sufficiently interested, *personally*, in my case, to pull me through," speak to her with sufficient clearness. But Danton, himself? Every human being must act from principle of some kind, from motives, good or bad. What past remembrance, what latent hope, can attract Eugene Danton to the dying pillow of a man he has so little cause to love or to respect as Jack Chamberlayne? The answer comes to her in

its unvarnished truth from Danton's own lips.

The weeks, as I said, have diminished to days, the days have become hours that stand between Jack and his legal coming of age, and he, the heir, is fast sinking! Death, all that can with certainty be called his own—Death, and the train of squandered yesterdays that lie behind! Mr. and Mrs. Robarts are back at Bayswater, in eager hourly expectation of what their destiny may send them. Bell Baltimore has returned to town, and calls often, but is not admitted, at the hotel in Piccadilly. (In half-joking, half-serious mood, I should explain, Jack was often wont to speak to Bell of the legacy he meant to leave her if ever he became master of his money). Post after post arrive delicate notes of sympathetic condolence from Lord Stair. Colonel Pascal's telegrams are really pathetic in their frequency and eagerness.

"Crows about the dying eagle," remarks Jack, with bitter pleasantry. "They might have the good sense to wait another twenty-four hours, be sure at least whether they are paying attention to a pauper or a millionaire!"

It is the evening of October the first, and Danton, as usual, is in close attendance beside the sick man's couch. Lawyers and lawyers' clerks have been with him throughout the day, busily getting ready that last will and testament to which, if he but live to see to-morrow's sun, Jack's feeble hand may scrawl a valid signature. Either the excitement attendant on this business, or the effects of some new medicine which Danton during the last few hours has been giving him, have brought a tinge of colour to the poor lad's wasted face; something like, yet awfully unlike, the brightness of health is in his blue eyes.

"Yes, they might have the decency to

wait a little longer, show somewhat less impatience for their spoil. However, I bear no ill-will," gasping piteously for breath as he speaks. "I have forgotten none of my friends, as time will show, you, least of all, Danton. I——" he lowers his voice, and signs to the other to approach his ear. "With the assistance of the lawyers, I have done you the best turn to-day, sincerely, and on my soul I believe it, that any man *could* do to another."

"Do me the good turn of not remembering me in this matter at all, my friend," is Danton's quick reply. They are alone together, but the door of the adjoining room, into which Leah has withdrawn, stands open. "Money, every supposed advantage connected with money, is outside my life, and has been so always."

Jack Chamberlayne looks at him like one perplexed.

"The first night we ever met, at Ma-

dame's, there, in Paris, I took a fancy to you," he remarks, in an altered voice. "Among all the people who were present, Colonel Pascal, my Lord Stair, and the rest, I said to myself, 'there's the one honest man out of the lot.' And I begin to think I was right. As to things that have happened since—well, the past is over and done with, and you have been a right-down good fellow to me in my need, and as to motives . . . hang it all, if one comes to look too closely into *them*——"

He breaks off fretfully, turning his face away on his pillow; and for the first time Danton begins to suspect the jealousy which, even in death, gnaws at Jack's heart.

"No use guessing at motives," he repeats, kindly. "Do you know, my poor friend, that that is a hard thing for you to say. What motive but one could have prompted me to help you in your trouble?"

Jack mutters an inaudible word or two between his teeth, a dark flush rises to his worn cheek and temple ; and Danton, after a few moments' painful silence, goes on.

"Most men have a special aptitude for some one employment under the sun, or, if not an aptitude, a liking. Mine is for being with sick people. It is my work and my pleasure. What I have done for you I would have done for any other suffering man in London, if I had had time."

"You have *made* time for me," says Jack, with emphasis. "You have given up exercise, air, your holiday, even, to come to my bedside. Well, and I am grateful, Danton, and to the best of my power I have done you an excellent good turn to-day, although, just at first, perhaps, you may not think so. Lord, lord," he continues, with a hollow laugh, "to think how dis-

interested we all are, when it comes to the point, about money ! Now I asked my wife a question this morning—in the presence of the lawyers you know, everything in due legal form—I asked Mrs. Chamberlayne a question . . . of importance, I can assure you, Monsieur, to more persons than herself. Her answer was a noble one. Under certain remote contingencies—lawyers' details, not worth entering upon—it is Mrs. Chamberlayne's wish that my money shall be divided among the different hospitals for sick children in London. I wonder what the Pascal family will say to that ! And now you—you, Danton, would like your name omitted from my will altogether."

Danton listens with patience to the end of this long tirade. Then he rests his hand upon one of the thin hot hands whose fingers are twitching so nervously at the coverlid of the bed.

"Jack, my poor fellow," he remarks, for the first and last time calling Jack Chamberlayne by his Christian name. "When a man has to bear such bodily pain as yours, 'tis hard that his mind should be worried by troubles that do not exist. You have got hold of a wrong suspicion about me—nay, never speak, I know it, and I mean to set that suspicion at rest. You ask what has been my motive in giving up exercise, rest, my holiday, even, for your sake?"

The door between the sick-room and the adjacent one is open, a shrinking figure stands within it. With senses feverishly sharpened, Leah can catch every accent as it falls from Danton's lips.

"I answered you just now, because nursing was to my taste, the one occupation for which I have an aptitude. I will go further. I have done my utmost to keep up your strength——"



"To lengthen out my tag-end of life!  
Call things by their right names."

"Because I know of what vital importance  
your coming of age must be to Mrs. Chamberlayne."

"Of course you have!" cries Jack, in his  
energy almost lifting himself upon his pillow.  
"Humbug for you and me to pretend not  
to understand each other! For the sake of  
your old *friendship* for the wife, you have  
been a faithful physician to the husband,  
eh?"

The expression of the pinched, hectic face  
jars on Danton horribly—the face that should  
be lying still and peaceful, life and its little  
hour of passions and conflicts, so nearly  
over!

"Yes," he answers, with slow, deliberate  
meaning, "for Mrs. Chamberlayne's sake,  
as much as for your own, I have done all  
that in me lay, to be of help to you. But it  
is neither of Mrs. Chamberlayne nor of you

that I have to speak now. I want you to know the truth about myself. This great god Money, my friend, in whose service men and women sacrifice themselves so readily, is to me abhorrent. I look upon a fortune like the one you hope to inherit as the blood-money of human souls. If you were to leave me the whole, or one shilling, of your hundred thousand pounds I would equally refuse the bequest. If, at any future time, through any circumstance, or combination of circumstances, your money could become mine, or in any remotest way benefit me, I would starve sooner than soil my hands by touching it. Do you believe me?"

Jack stares at him in a sort of stupor.

"I believe you, and I have been a fool," he whispers faintly. "All my life has been a mistake . . . I can see it now. Danton, you will bear no malice towards the poor dying wretch you have befriended? I . . . have been a fool."

So their interview comes to an end. Whatever Jack Chamberlayne's five-and-twenty years of existence may have proved him, these words, the last that Danton hears him speak, are the words of wisdom.





## CHAPTER XIV.

“OH, THAT 'TWERE POSSIBLE.”

THE cord is loosed, the bowl broken at the fountain. Spendthrift, worthless Jack Chamberlayne has passed away, not altogether unmanfully. His executors have given orders for his tombstone; the money-lenders have put in their claims against his estate. His acquaintance, the season of the year being stagnant, are making conversation out of his will; his tradesmen regret him. So much for Jack Chamberlayne. And the

hundred thousand pounds—what of them?

Jack lived until the evening of his twenty-fifth birthday, retaining his faculties clear to the last, and affording ample time to the lawyers for the completion of their work. Not even Hetty, disconsolate Hetty, can raise a doubt as to the validity of his will! And he kept everyone of his connections in remembrance, as he promised to do, Colonel Pascal “my worthy father-in-law,” receives as his legacy his own I.O.U’s., amounting, it may be said, to a packet of very respectable thickness. Bell Baltimore gets a portrait of Jack himself, that “my dear cousin was often good enough to admire,” set in brilliants. Hetty Robarts has five hundred pounds, wherewith to buy mourning. Even to Lord Stair, a mere casual acquaintance, is bequeathed a memento, a ring twisted in the shape of a serpent, with fiery ruby eyes, selected out of the scanty stock of Jack’s personal jewelry.

To Leah goes his entire fortune, minus the West-End Shylocks' charges—a hundred thousand pounds, as rigidly, righteously tied up in trust as English law and English lawyers can tie them. If she marry again, the usual legal defences are made against the second husband, as against a certain robber and possible bankrupt, with settlements cumbersome and many, in respect of generations yet unborn—provided always the second husband be a British subject. If she marry an alien, she is to forfeit every shilling by the act. (Did not Jack, with his last breath, hint of this good turn to Danton?) And, “in accordance with my dear wife’s expressed wishes,” the money shall be divided amongst the different hospitals for sick children in the Metropolis.

An unjust will, a mad will, an exceedingly fair and equitable will, and a great deal more than the Pascal family had any right to expect. So run the varying opinions

of rumour, during the fleeting space of time in which Jack Chamberlayne and his money are spoken of at all. The next question is—how are the provisions of the will to be carried out ?

Will Mrs. Chamberlayne marry Lord Stair, or not ?

Joining one scrap of truth—or falsehood—together, after its manner of mosaic-work, rumour would say, Not !

Through the agency of Mrs. Baltimore. (Surely you must know her by sight ? Faded blonde who drove a pair of hack roan ponies last season—kind of person you meet at public balls, and at Court. Have heard, but don't believe that there is a husband somewhere.) Through the agency of Bell Baltimore it transpires that Mrs. Chamberlayne resolutely refused to hold communication with Lord Stair from the hour in which she became a widow. His Lordship, it is known, has gone to Malta for bronchitis.

*Would* a man like that have bronchitis and go to Malta, unless he believed his suit to be hopeless? For once in his life, Lord Stair's game has been not only a losing but a ridiculous one; and admirable resignation do his best friends display under his defeat.

Will Mrs. Chamberlayne marry the mysterious "alien" pointed at by her husband's will, and whom it takes no very great amount of intelligence to connect with the Italian doctor who attended Jack Chamberlayne in his last sickness?

Marry for love, and let the hundred thousand pounds be divided among the hospitals of the Metropolis? Yes, a woman with Jewish blood in her veins, a woman who, for money, could bring herself to accept Jack Chamberlayne, would be so likely to commit the crime of a romance, incur the brand of poverty afterwards!

What *will* Mrs. Chamberlayne do? She



is scarcely twenty-one years old; presumably has another half-century of life before her, with wealth unlimited, and (barring one unimportant restriction) liberty to love and marry where she will. A well-gilt perspective, surely, for any one, for Leah most of all; Leah, who a short twelvemonth ago deliberately sold herself for this price, who was reared from her cradle to consider money as the sum of human ambition, a position, luxury, ease, the only things under the light of God's sun worth possessing!

Colonel Pascal walking about Paris in his sables—almost as deep as he wore when cruel fate first made him a widower—Colonel Pascal, with handsome Naomi on his arm, can scarce command a decently solemn face as he speaks of the affliction that has befallen his beloved elder daughter.

“Mrs. Chamberlayne is so young, so mere a girl, that we may hope much from time, but poor Chamberlayne's death has been a

terrible blow to her, as to us all. Not strong? Oh, you are entirely misinformed." The Prince Charming actually writhes at those two words, yet has to hear them often. *Not strong!* His Leah not strong—with a dowry of a hundred thousand pounds! The very suggestion sounds to him like impiety. "Mrs. Chamberlayne's health is perfect, I thank you. There is some talk of spending the winter in Italy with my youngest little girl, but more for the child's sake than her own. Mrs. Chamberlayne's affection for her sisters has always been something charming—charming!"

. . . And Leah, herself? Reader, do you know what it is to exist, crushed beneath the weight of a granted prayer, and with no prospect but death of having the awful burthen, the answer to your own desire, lifted from you? Just at first, little as the world may think it, she grieved honestly for Jack; remembering only his better

qualities, his early love for her, the tardily awakened repentance of his last hours of life. But this grief, of its nature, is evanescent. A human being who has not filled the heart, living, can scarcely be expected to fill the memory dead. Then there comes upon her a craving for movement, a restless longing to get away from London, England—from everything connected with the hopes and the despair of the last six months. Deb might be strengthened by spending a winter in Italy: let Italy be her destination! Her physician tells her, looking grave as his fingers touch the fluttering pulse, that she is herself out of health and needs change. Nothing, of course, to be seriously alarmed about, says the suave professional optimist, still, these lowered conditions of the system may not unwisely be regarded as the borderland between security and alarm. "The spirits must positively be raised, my dear Mrs. Chamberlayne! Let the mind once

---

recover its tone through the cheerful influence of travelling, and the body will need no further medicine, depend upon it."

But travelling, with every added means of enjoyment that wealth can yield, does but minister, Leah discovers, to the fever that consumes her. The strong hours master her in the south as in the north! Alas, when one has grown weary of the sun, what matters it whether he shine upon Italian olive-groves or English elms? With her powers of happiness at their vividest, Leah's was not a temperament to derive much solace from external interests: the earth must ever turn on its axis with supreme and immediate reference to herself! Naples and Rome in the winter, the Bagni de Lucca in summer; picture galleries, smiling landscape — what healing is there in it all, for her, Leah Chamberlayne? What comfort can her empty heart reap from this moving panorama

of mountain, sea, and city, from the highest that man's hand has accomplished in art, the fairest that God's hand has lavished on nature !

Were not the experiment of one more London season worth trying? So, after a year and a-half of wandering, she begins to ask herself. Come—one is not dead at twenty-two ! It may be that among familiar faces, familiar scenes, this lethargy will pass with an effort. Return to the great mart where all things (or so nearly all) are to be bought and sold ! Hire a house, possess carriages, liveries, friends ! Resolve to *live*, by dint of will, by mere mechanical daily habit ; and, taking example from the all-forgetting world around, trust to time for one's cure !

And the London house is hired ; liveries, carriages, and friends are possessed, and Leah is not cured. Passionate disappointment, selfish or the reverse, unfits us, fatally, for

the littleness of artificial life. How, after learning the taste of that divinest anguish, shall a human soul sink to the talk, the interests of a Bell Baltimore? How return to the fopperies of upholsterers and dress-makers, to an existence of fashion? Leah came back from Italy in a chronic state of life-weariness, inert, passive under each day's weight as it fell upon her. Before long, her disease takes a new and active form. She begins to look upon gold as upon a living personal enemy, to discern the raw material of every past ill through its glitter. Her idol has become her destroyer ;—standing, in hateful successful rivalry, between her heart and the one remote chance earth might yet hold for her of happiness. The fine London house, with its velvet-piled carpets and obsequious servants, the noiselessly hung carriages, the delicate meats, the wines, the friends . . . oh, *how* she loathes them all !

Her greatest pleasure, it would be juster to say her only one, is an occasional day spent at the seaside cottage, where Deb, under Aunt Hepzibah's homely rule, wears cotton frocks and builds oyster-shell palaces once more. Here, at least, are neither flunkies nor friends, delicate meats nor velvet-piled carpets; and here Leah may bring her faltering lips to speak of Danton.

She has never seen him, never heard from him since that day when he stood beside Jack's dying couch nearly two years ago. But Deb, in her own fashion, keeps up a correspondence with her friend.

"M. Danton saved me from starvation in Paris," says Deb, in the old primesaultier style. "He made Madame give me mutton chops. He rescued me from papa's economy and the blackbeetles in the downstairs cupboard, and I shall love him and write to him

always. A million thousand pounds should not come between me and my dear M. Danton."

So it happens, through Deb's small agency, that a great result is brought to pass.

One day in June—the roses are smelling fresh around Aunt Hepzibah's windows, the sea and sky are blue—Deb, with an air of mystery, puts a letter into her sister's hands. "A letter from a very old friend, Leah, and one who is more anxious about you and me, perhaps, than we think for. Do you recognise the handwriting?"

"I believe I have seen it on one occasion in my life," Leah answers, with a trembling smile.

And then she turns away from the window, turns to the roses, and the sea, and sky, and reads.

"You have not written to me for a great



many weeks, little Deb. Have you lost my address, or what? Write to me at once, child, and tell me some news about your sister, Leah—if you can, find out if she would care to receive a visit from me? I have seen Mrs. Chamberlayne once or twice of late, without her seeing me, and I want to have a talk to her about her health.

“Your affectionate friend.

“EUGENE DANTON.”

A flush, lovelier than her forfeited bloom of youth and health, stains Leah's down-bent face as she reads. Danton loves her still. And at the thought it seems as though all the long separation, all the mocking weight of wealth were suddenly lightened. Love? No; one will not speak of *that*. It is possible that she may win his forgiveness, at least, before she die.



## CHAPTER XV.

“AFTER LONG GRIEF AND PAIN.”

A FOUR o'clock sun shines on the motley crowd in Park and Row; on Bell Baltimore driving her hack roan ponies, as heretofore, but wearing a somewhat thicker cloud of pearl powder, a somewhat thicker veil than when we saw her last; on Hetty Robarts in her modest brougham; on *Tatters* in hers. The kaleidoscope of fashion presenting much the same brilliancy as it did two years ago, although

with some trifling changes of pattern, some readjustment of its bits of paste and tinsel. So runs the prosperous, pain-ignoring world without, now let us glance within.

Within, before a looking-glass in her dressing-room, stands Leah, something as she stood on that October night in Paris, with Deb once more enacting the part of critic. A costly dressing-room this—throwing into shade the meagre apartment on Madame Bonchrétien's third étage—with mirrors from ceiling to floor, with soft lights, sparingly admitted, with hangings, artistically draped. The full time of Mrs. Chamberlayne's widowhood is over; past the stage of lavenders and greys through which youthful widows lapse tenderly back into conquest and colour. Milliner's work of every hue and texture is strewn around.

"The blue is a perfect dress, *as* a dress, Deb, but I have not quite the complexion

for blue, now. Draw up the blind, my dear; one wants daylight, not rose-colour, for rehearsal. And this eau-de-nil! Fancy my tallow candle cheeks set off by eau-de-nil! I believe, after all, I shall do wisely to return to sober black."

"But M. Danton likes to see people in pale colours. I have heard him say so, often. And you know, Leah, it is such bad luck to put on black for a wedding or anything."

"A wedding—you little wisehead!" cries Leah. "And pray who is going to one? What connection is there between a wedding and——"

"——And M. Danton coming, by his own request, to see you, after all this long time that you have not been friends? Well, I don't know that there is any connection, just at present, Leah. Still, the moment I received his letter I felt——"

"——Deb, child, if you knew the truth,

you would not chatter so lightly. M. Danton and I are going to meet and shake hands once more across a grave. Remember that, little Deb, across a grave! If I do not wear black, I must, at least, choose something better suited to the occasion than any of these furbelowed absurdities that Morgan and the milliners between them have been pleased to prepare for me."

She crosses over as she speaks to a bureau, unlocks a drawer, and after a second or two of hesitation, takes forth a brown silk dress, faded of hue, unfashionable of make; the dress in which she first saw Danton, and which her own hands packed away amidst her trousseau fineries on the night before her marriage.

"*That?*" exclaims Deb, with unconcealed disappointment. "You mean to wear a faded, shabby dress of a hundred years ago, just on the day I want you to look your very best?"

"I believe I shall look my 'very best' in this," says Leah, with a blush, conscious as a girl's. "I looked hideous enough, in all conscience, in the brilliant blues and green. But, Debbie, mind you are to give an honest opinion. Think—not of the number of yards in the skirt, or the want of style in the sleeves, as Morgan would—but of the general effect upon my complexion."

She assumes an air of gaiety, but her hands tremble as she fastens the buttons of the dress, the colour comes and goes upon her face.

"Leah . . . oh, Leah, how awfully thin you have grown!" cries Deb, the tears rushing to her eyes. "Why, did that brown silk ever *fit* you?"

And the child presses nearer—a cold dread for the first time entering her heart—to Leah's side.

"Well, I am a little bit thinner, am I not,

Deb? I have lost my *ong-bong-pong*, as Mrs. Wynch used to say. But I am getting old you must remember—almost three-and-twenty! One cannot keep one's youthful roundness for ever."

Leah has wasted to a shadow of her former self. The artifices of the milliners, laces and puffs and frillings have concealed the fact with tolerable success, hitherto. The old brown silk betrays the secret with such startling clearness as even to shock herself.

"And papa and Naomi have never had a day's illness since they were born," says Deb, her small face white and scared. "And you—oh, it's no use your putting me off any more, Leah, you *don't* grow stronger."

"There may be better things in life than growing stronger," answers Leah. "As to losing flesh—it is no sign of health, Debbie, one way or the other. And M. Danton is

a doctor, you know. He will judge of me as I am, not as I seem."

"But you will not wear that dress?" the child persists, "promise me you will not. It makes you look a skeleton."

"The colour suits me, my dear, I told you so, long ago in Paris, and as to these few loose folds—well, we will have the blinds drawn down, so that M. Danton shall not scan defects too narrowly. And you know I mean to receive him in my little morning-room where Morgan takes care that everything shall be rose-coloured."

"And will you wear no ornaments, Leah?"

"Yes, I will wear some flowers—bring the cup of violets from the mantelshelf, and select the freshest for me you can find—and this knot of yellow ribbon in my hair." Taking one as she speaks from her dressing-table drawer. "And now, Deborah, the last finishing touches given, can you have



the assurance to tell me that I am not a pretty woman still?"

"If only—I did not remember you as you used to be," answers Deb. "But perhaps M. Danton may forget——"

"——Ah, let us hope so!" interrupts Leah, with sudden harshness of tone, "I know too well what you mean, child. Let us hope that M. Danton will have had the kindness to forget!"

And she rests her hand upon the table, and looks curiously at her own image in the glass—something as the women of Verona may have looked at the faded face of him of old, who had "seen Hell" and lived.

"I believe there is about enough resemblance left to *recall* the Leah Pascal of three years ago," she remarks at length, "no more. Poor little Deb—never cry over the loss of a pair of pink-and-white cheeks, child! They were not worth a tear. It is not for the sake of my beauty that M.

Danton has volunteered to come and see me to-day."

But a sigh, that is well nigh a sob, escapes Leah's breast as she turns with weary disgust from the glass. To forfeit wealth, position, friends, all the prizes of accident that have fallen into her hands, were nothing to her; over the departure of health she has not wasted a regret. To realize the loss of beauty, the beauty for which Danton first loved her—this is the bitterness of death.

"I hear a knock at the front door," says Deb, presently, and the child takes one of Leah's hands and holds it wistfully between her own. "It is Danton's knock, Leah. I should know it among a hundred. My dear, would it give you courage for me to come down with you at first—just to take the edge off the meeting, you know?"

Deb's lips quiver, her eyes fairly brim over with tears at last. But Leah has recovered all her self-possession. "It is better

for me to receive M. Danton alone, Deb. You shall come in by-and-by, when I ring for you. Courage! Is it such a very hard thing, do you think, to face reconciliation with a friend one likes?"

"Your hands are cold, so cold," says poor Debbie. "And a minute or two ago they burned like fire."

"The weather, Deb, nothing else. In spite of Doctor Wentworth, I maintain that there is a touch of east wind in the air, still, and the east wind always fevers me. Kiss me, child—so. Now tell me once more how I look?" And with this she takes a sad parting glance at her mirror. "Why, Deb, I have actually got a colour. In spite of all you say, I maintain that I may pass for a pretty woman still—if only M. Danton will have the kindness to forget!"



## CHAPTER XVI.

“TO FEEL THE ARMS OF MY TRUE LOVE.”

READER, for one moment after they come face to face he thinks her unchanged—poor heart, could she know it!—with such transitory brightness does the joy of meeting invest her. Then there returns before his vision a girl in the blossom of youth, dressed like this, a knot of yellow ribbon in her hair, some violets at her breast. He sees the fair white arms, the rounded throat, the cheeks—and knows

that he is looking upon a shadow. "About enough resemblance left to recall the Leah Pascal of three years ago, no more."

Dead silent, Danton stands; vainly struggling against the truth that is forced upon him, unable to trust his voice lest it betray him. Leah is the first to speak.

"It was so very good of you to offer to come, M. Danton. But, indeed, I cannot think why you should not have visited me sooner. Two years seems such a big slice gone out of one's life, and life is so short—and—and Debbie will be here directly. How much stronger Deb has grown, has she not?"

Danton takes both her little thin cold hands, and grasps them tightly in his.

"And you?" he asks. "I want to hear everything about yourself." How well she remembers that grave tender tone! How plainly she sees the chestnuts in the Champs

Elyseés, and the stars shining through their branches! "Are you strong, Mrs. Chamberlayne? Do you suffer?"

"Look at me," is Leah's answer, raising her face to his; "read the answer for yourself. Deb was telling me, not five minutes ago, that I have grown an ugly old woman—at three-and-twenty! What do you say?"

"I say that you look ill, and that you are prettier than ever," is Danton's prompt reply. "Don't you remember we made a compact to speak the truth to each other always? I hold to my word still, you see."

And loosing her hands, he stands back a step, and looks at her—as a man can never look, save at the woman he loves!

The rose-coloured blinds, after all, have not been lowered, the room is flooded with honest, fault-exposing sunlight, yet Leah shrinks not from its contact. Before

the expression of Danton's face vanity dies ; self, and self's humiliation are forgotten in her exceeding great pity for *him* !

"I have had a kind of fever about me for some time past, M. Danton ; that is what has pulled me down a little, as you see. It is nothing very serious. My attacks, when they come, are sharp, but soon over. Don't let our meeting be turned into a professional visit, please," and she smiles. "I get quite enough of them, I can assure you, from Doctor Wentworth."

"I have come expressly to know how you are, to think, to speak of nothing but you !" cries Danton, with passion in his voice. "What subject but your health would you have me talk about? Wentworth visits you often, you tell me. And your attacks, when they come on, are sharp. What are your other symptoms? Do you cough?"

"Not a bit," says Leah, gaily, but without raising her eyes to his. "And I eat

well, and sleep as much as life in London will ever let me. There is nothing really the matter with me, M. Danton, but a little nervousness — the complaint of so many foolish, indolent victims of civilization. If I had had, ages ago, to gain my living by potatoe weeding, I should have been cured!”

“And you have had no other opinion, sought no higher skill than Wentworth’s?”

For a short space Leah hesitates; then, “As you insist upon putting me formally on my trial,” she replies, “I suppose it will save time if I answer categorically. Only you must never speak of all this before Deb! To poor Debbie we call my malady neuralgia. I had another opinion, some months ago. At Doctor Wentworth’s request, I called in K——, soon after we came back from Italy. You have heard of him?”

“Yes . . . I have heard of him,” answers



Danton, his colour changing at this abrupt verification of his darkest fears.

"They say he is the best man in London for anything to do with the heart, and I am afraid there is no disguising that I suffer from something of that kind."

"And he has ordered you?"

"Rest, freedom from excitement, an untroubled conscience, early hours. Very much the same list of impossibilities that were ordered for me, nearly three years ago, by Doctor Danton in Paris."

"What seemed impossibilities then may be easy of attainment now," says Danton, possessing himself once more of her hand. "You are mistress of your own actions, Mrs. Chamberlayne. You have everything that money——"

Leah starts away, as though the word had stung her. "Money!" she exclaims with bitterness. "Oh, that I should hear its name from you! Money is my curse,

my enemy! It is *that* which has destroyed me. I feel its weight when I wake in the morning, it pursues me through the day, lies down beside me at night. But for money I should not be the miserable wretch I am. But for money——”

“—Leah, but for money, you would be mine?” And as he speaks Danton’s arms are round her, hold her close. “Let me hear you say so. After the months—the years of weary waiting, let me have a moment’s hope at last!”

\* \* \* \* \*

“One thing is certain, M. Danton. You cannot be in full possession of your senses to-day. However, I will give you another chance of escape. In marrying me, understand that you will be marrying a beggar, Sir—a literal beggar, without one shilling in the world.”

“Happily I shall be able to earn shillings enough for us both, Mrs. Chamberlayne. I

told you so once before, if you remember,  
long ago, and you would not believe  
me."

But Leah believes him now—too late!





## CHAPTER XVII.

“ROUND ME ONCE AGAIN !”

TOO late, computing by hours. And yet it seems to me human joys should be measured by their intensity, rather than by the exact portion of artificially divided time that they may happen to endure. Between the afternoon of their reconciliation, and the day on which Leah becomes Danton's wife, just eleven days elapse; during eleven long June days this feverish, changeful, hardly-satisfied nature

tastes perfect happiness. Of how many contented, humdrum, long-lived people out of ten thousand could as much be said?

"My story, if any one should take the trouble to write it, has—that first essential for popularity—a happy ending," she remarks to Danton, once. "It has been pretty tragic, hitherto, in spite of some few interludes of outside gilt and varnish. But now—"

"—Now it comes to the sombre grey conclusion of a love-match," he interrupts her, hastily. "We shall have to live upon, my Leah, nearly as much as you have found in sufficient, hitherto, for milliners and the glove-shops."

"To live upon!" And one of the wistful smiles that make his heart cold, crosses Leah's face. "Ah, I dare say if it came to adding up butchers' and bakers' bills you would regret your bargain, M. Danton." She can never be brought to call him by

his Christian name. It was as M. Danton that she first knew him in the Rue Castiglione. She is well content that he should be M. Danton to the last. "Happily, we need not think of butchers and bakers now. The only immediate expense to which I shall be forced to put you is my wedding-dress."

And that same afternoon, when his hospital duty is done, she makes Danton go with her to choose it. A quaker-like grey dress it is, bought "for economy," at an East End linendraper's. Morgan, the maid, I am sure, would disdain to be married in the like. But Leah feels better pleased with her purchase than she ever felt over a work of art from Worth or Roger—in her pleasure, can scarce refrain from letting the shop-people divine the occasion on which the dress is to be worn. For it is paid for out of Danton's pocket!

The burthen of her own wealth seems already lessened at the thought.

And she snatches at every possible fore-taste of her coming freedom; delights in playing at poverty, just as when she and Naomi were children they used to delight in playing at riches. Leah would not be Leah unless she over-acted her part a little, were it at the last page of her history. Make use of her brougham? No; she has taken a distaste for broughams. The noiseless hearse-like movement, the want of air makes her ill. For freedom, independence, comfort, what private carriage in London can compare with a hansom? And trained skirts are incompatible with hansom cabs; the old brown silk (not bought out of Jack Chamberlayne's money) suits them better. And stalls and boxes are a mistake. When you go to the theatre, how charming to be able to wear a bonnet and sit in a place where you can enjoy the acting and the music, unnoticed!

Danton, who estimates too well the nature of her strength, would fain have her husband it more jealously. But Leah insists upon spending every evening that he can spare abroad, and always in the same Bohemian fashion ; she is in a state bordering on exaltation ; vitality—such feverish vitality as is left her—supporting the brain, at the expense of all other interests ; and is insensible to bodily fatigue. Once they go to the opera—aloft among the gods, you may be sure, “as befits our means,” an expression for ever on Leah’s lips now—and far beneath, in one of the boxes on the grand tier, she sees Lord Stair. Milor’s portmanteaus have left the Rue Castiglione for good ; Milor has paid Bonchrétien to the last sou of her bills. Not a tradesman in London but would be proud to obey his lordship’s orders, or honour his noble signature to a note of hand. For Lord Stair is about to be married. He has been into the



city's depths, he has found his Miss Molasses, the harsh-featured, not over-youthful lady by whose side he sits—the future Viscountess Stair.

Coming home that night—the weather is warm, the sky star-illuminated, and the lovers walk some little portion of their road—Leah, for the first time since her engagement, makes mention of Lord Stair's name, and of the past. But Danton stops her lips. In putting money aside she has broken, he tells her, with every person and thing that once belonged to money. Lord Stair has no more existence for him, Eugene Danton, than if he inhabited a different planet. All that concerns him is her love. The love, he adds, with quick emotion, that, God willing, is to be the crown and blessing of his whole future life.

The swift-winged hours pass by. Ere Leah can realize to herself that she is happy

—*Leah Chamberlayne happy!*—will come the day that they have fixed upon for their marriage. And still no presage of evil, no cloud big as a man's hand, has risen above their horizon. They are always together now, and alone. Leah is jealous even of Deb, and has sent the child back to her home with Aunt Hepzibah. She is jealous of every hour that divides her from Danton, of the air he breathes, of the sun that shines upon him in her absence. So certainly does,

“Ruined love when it is built anew,

Grow fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.”

Danton has obtained a month's holiday from work, and (the Prince Charming being happily absent in Brussels) Leah has planned that they shall spend their honeymoon in Paris. The whirl and restlessness of a great city are precisely the influences she should fly from, Danton urges. The seaside—Switzerland—any choice were a wiser one

than Paris. Leah shows her old fine superiority to reason. It was in Paris that she and Danton first met; and as to health—what watering-place in Europe can vie, as far as shade goes, with the Tuileries gardens or the Elysées? The scene of their starlit walk, of her life's poor hour of poetry: Elysian fields, to which she can now look back with conscience almost unweighed by remorse!

The preparations for the wedding are made; the special license is ready, the bride's quaker dress completed. In another two days—to-morrow—the hospitals for sick children throughout London will be enriched. Then Leah falls ill. Doctor Wentworth, hastily called in, declares the presence of another physician necessary, and with the two men of science Danton confers, and learns—no, there was nothing for him to learn, he gains but the official label of a Latin name for his despair! Leah's unstable hold

on life may be loosed at any moment, in any sudden excitement, any sharp paroxysm of pain; may be prolonged—such rare cases stand on record—for years.

“Tell me word for word what they say.” This is her first request to him, when the physicians, grave of face, fee in hand, have rolled away in their broughams. “Don’t forget our old compact, now when I need truth so desperately. I am no coward. I wish to be told my exact chances of life and death?”

Danton tells her, not in cold language that black and white can reproduce, but lovingly, tenderly—so tenderly as almost to make the death-warrant sound sweet.

“For there is the possibility, the forlorn outside hope of our spending years together, yet,” she says, looking at his white face with yearning eyes. “And the cleverest doctors are wrong sometimes. Why should these two be infallible? Oh, how I want to

live! I am so young—the world is so good. Surely the desire of life, in itself, should give me strength?”

It gives enormous strength, of a transitory, fatally consuming kind. The preparations for their wedding, as I have said, are completed, even to such business details as letters for Colonel Pascal and the lawyers. Only twenty-four hours more, and they will be man and wife. Twenty-four hours more! Leah *forces* herself with a last supreme effort, into rallying, comes down to the drawing-room, talks cheerfully over the details of their coming journey, makes Danton sing for her—the Serenade of Schubert, and “*Si tu savais*,” just to bring back “that hapless day on which his reason began to play him traitor.”

. . . As the afternoon wears on, a great change comes over her. She, herself, pronounces it a change for the better, and Danton, against his judgment, is carried

away by the false light in her eyes, the false strength that lends volume to her pulse and voice.

"Let my chains be loosed," so after a while she whispers to him. "Let me once feel myself at liberty, and I shall be content. To die, still in bondage, would be a double death. We know so little of what is to come. How can we tell . . . you and I . . . that the awful weight might not be on me through eternity?"

And she cannot free herself from the thought. If she were to die with the load of the hundred thousand pounds, the blood-money of her own soul still upon her!

"You may be released from it at any moment that you choose," says Danton, taking her fevered hand in his. "We have no friends to bid to our marriage, my Leah, no wedding feast to set forth. In two hours from this time the burthen of your wealth can be put away from you for ever if you will?"

And Leah does will it. Coquettish coyness, engaging feminine irresolution — ah, these are things that belong to the living: she has done with them.

When Danton has quitted the house, to make what arrangements are needful for their marriage, she goes up to her room and dresses herself in the quaker dress and bonnet that are to be her bridal attire. Then she puts together the few little trinkets that belonged to her as a girl; trinkets that were her mother's, mostly; divides, seals them up and writes "Naomi" and "Deb" on either packet. These she carries with her, and one solitary ornament out of her well-plenished jewel boxes—a cheap mosaic locket, such as the common people wear in Rome, containing only a few torn violet petals and a date, graven inside the case.

The house is quiet, she passes down the staircase unnoticed by any of the servants, and opens the front door where Danton

already awaits her. Then she finds herself driving to another quarter of the town; by-and-by, like one taking part in a dream, knows that she stands before the altar-rails of a dimly-lighted church, a sleepy-eyed clergyman, white-surpliced, with open book confronting her, and Danton at her side.

“Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?”

For the second time she hears that question, for the second time takes those solemnest oaths that human speech can register, but with what a difference! How have her surroundings altered since the evening in the Marbœuf Chapel, when she knelt in Brussels and orange-blossoms, and—with special correspondants, and titled groomsman, and a gracefully agitated father looking on—foreswore herself.

The ceremony is short, exceedingly: something it may be, upon the bride's face, warning the sleepy-eyed clergyman that 'tis



wise to proceed with haste. In less than half an hour, all is over, the fees are paid, the names signed: and then Danton takes his wife away to her new home, the bachelor lodging in an unfashionable East End street, for which her pride of wealth and luxury has been exchanged.

"And this is home, this is where we are to live," Leah falters, clinging heavily to her husband's arm as he leads her up the staircase. "Oh, M. Danton, I am better already. The weight has passed from me. This house seems fairer to me than any Italian palace that Deb and I saw during our travels, for I am free!"

Danton's sitting-room is on the first floor, and in spite of its British chairs and tables, possesses something of the same artistic atmosphere that once belonged to "the Count Danton's suite," in the Rue Castiglione, Fresh flower-scents greet the bride as she enters, a piano stands open; the engravings

she remembers are on the walls ; the pipes of all nations, the faded satin slipper used for a tobacco-pouch, are above the mantel-piece.

“ Things would have been ordered differently had I thought that I was to bring my wife home to-day,” says Danton, throwing his arms around her. “ But my poor love is fated to taste the full flavour of poverty from the beginning.”

“ I taste a sweeter flavour than I have ever known before !” is Leah’s answer. “ This is the coming home that pleases me. When you remember me now . . . I mean, if at any future time we are separated, it will be as forming part of your common life—the life I should have shared of——”

She turns from his side, and with a failing step moves round the room, looking, one by one, over his books and pictures, her face held away from him. Ere starting on some long and unknown journey you might imagine a traveller thus taking into

his memory every little familiar detail of the home he loves, and shall see no more. Then she comes back, very shadowy, very spent-looking she has become during the last two or three minutes, and steals a pale hand round his neck.

"If I might rest now, M. Danton? This has been a tiring day . . . I should feel quite strong after a little rest."

He wheels round a low chair for her to the window, then kneels beside her, so that she may lean her head upon his breast. Evening is closing in fast, such sky as can be seen across the opposite roofs is opal, the hush that even London knows at the decline of a summer day seems to brood above the city. A smile, lovely in its expression of absolute peace, flickers round Leah's lips, the lips whose girlish beauty cruel time has had no power to spoil; a light tranquil as the yellow sunset itself, is in her eyes.

"It is so good to rest—I want perfect

rest," she murmurs, "and I know when I wake I shall be better. M. Danton, you will be a friend always to little Deb, you will talk to the child of me? Never let my name be put away . . . between you and Deb . . . because I am gone . . . And think of me with forgiveness! I sinned against you and against my own soul . . . but I have suffered—suffered . . ."

And then comes silence.

In the arms of her true love, riches and their burthen lifted from her, Leah's spirit has fallen asleep—to know no earthly waking.

The "last words of the romance" are spoken.

THE END.

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